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| **Doctrines of the Bible** |
| **A Concise Encyclopedia** |
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| **by David Scott Nichols MD** |
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**Doctrines of the Bible**

**A Concise Encyclopedia**

I am writing this treatise on the *Doctrines of the Bible* in an effort to present the major Christian beliefs that should be understood by all Christians. I have found throughout my life that many people who call themselves Christian do not really know what the Bible teaches concerning what it means to be a Christian… and what it teaches about living the Christian life. For example, I have asked hundreds of people who claim to be Christian if they believe that they will go to heaven upon passing from this life into the next… over 50% do not give me the appropriate Christian response. Some say, “I hope that I will…” Others say something such as, “I think so since I have been a good person.” A Christian with good knowledge of the Bible would not give these responses. Anyone who undertakes the study that follows will gain a strong biblical knowledge of what it means to be a Bible believing Christian. Knowing these doctrines will allow people to distinguish truth from heresy. This is important as there is so much false teaching concerning the Bible and Christianity in the world today. This will be a fairly extensive study and I will be supplying a great deal of biblical support for any and all doctrinal positions that are taken. There will be times where there is a difference of opinion on some doctrines and these differences will be noted and discussed. None of these differences concern critical Bible doctrines. This will be an important study to undertake. Remember, “***All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine****, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,* ***17****that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Historically, there have been at least three criteria used to determine if a doctrine is among those foundational to the Christian faith. These three criteria are as follows:

1. All doctrine must result from a study of the Word of God – the Bible. (2 Tim 3:16,17; Jude 3; Dt 4:2; Rev 22:18,19)
2. No doctrine may undermine the role of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in the life of a believer. (Gal. 1:8)
3. The doctrine should not contradict the creeds of the Orthodox (undivided) Christian Church. These would include the Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian, and Chalcedonian Creeds -- which speak of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one God (the Trinity), and of Jesus Christ as uniquely God and man (the Incarnation). These creeds expressed the faith of Christians when they were written almost two thousand years ago, and have helped to unify and protect Christians against heresy for centuries.

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1. **Creation:**

It makes sense to me to begin this discussion of Christian doctrine with the topic of how our universe… and everything within it… began. According to the Bible, creation is a gift from God. Let us read from the Bible: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* ***2****The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”* (Gen: 1:1-2) Here the Bible tells the reader that God created the universe (the heavens and the earth) at a point in time (in fact, it was the beginning of the dimension of time). The Hebrew word used here for *created* was “bara” which means “creation out of nothing.” In other words, God literally created new matter and energy when He created our universe. There are many other verses in the Bible that tell us that God created the entire universe. For example, *“All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”* (John 1:3) And Paul said, “*For in Him all things were created, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities – all things were created through Him and for Him*.” (Col 1:16) Paul also noted in his letter to the Romans that God is He who *“calls into existence the things that do not exist.”* (Romans 4:17)

Returning to the verses of Genesis, we see that God then molded this newly created universe into what we see today. The word used when shaping the previously created matter is “asah”… which can be translated as “made” or “fashion.” Prior to the creation of the universe, God existed, but, of course, there was no universe. God, the Bible tells us elsewhere, is eternal (we will go into this aspect of God in more detail, later). On the other hand, the universe clearly did have a beginning. A little later, the Bible says… *“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth;’ and it was so.* ***12****And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good….. ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.’ And it was so.* ***25****And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.”* (Gen 1:11-12 & 24-25) Here we see that plants and animals were commanded to appear by God and to reproduce to yield their ***own kind…*** not to evolve to produce different species over time. *“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’”* (Gen 1:26) *“The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”* (Gen 2:7) *“So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.* ***22****And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.”* (Gen 2:21-22) In these verses, we see that God specifically made man and woman after his own likeness. Certainly, this does not give any suggestion of the concept of the deist or the evolutionist who suggest that God simply let natural processes proceed by pure chance, and this resulted in mankind evolving one day via innumerable mutations over millions of years.

Although there is a difference of opinion among committed Christians on the subject of the age of the universe (young-earth creationists vs. old-earth creationists… and I will go into much detail on these issues in a later treatise on *Apologetics: The Philosophical, Scientific, and Historical Evidence for the Existence of God*) there is still uniformity among Christians on the following critical doctrinal points:

* There is one God who has eternally existed.
* Creation was by this God and came out of nothing (ex nihilo).
* Everything in the universe was created by God.
* Adam and Eve are persons of history and were a direct and special creation by God.
* The Genesis account in the Bible is an historical account… not a myth or allegory.

For almost eighteen hundred years, the Christian church accepted this doctrine of creation implicitly. Generally, only members of the Hindu or Buddhist religion had an issue with the concept of a creation event. These two religions believe that the universe has always existed… hence, they have no need to postulate a creative force. During the last portion of the 18th century and into the 19th century there were significant new ideas that were introduced in the fields of philosophy and science. Thomas Paine published a treatise called the *Age of Reason*. He rejected miracles (please see **Doctrine #2** below) and even went so far as to write that the Bible was just a, "book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy.” He did believe that there was a God who created the universe along with a set of natural laws by which the universe has run on since the beginning of time. He, like other deists, believed that God does not intervene in nature… he just lets the universe develop based solely on those natural laws that he introduced when he created the universe. Given this set of beliefs, a deist does not believe in the wonderful biblical explanation of creation and life as described in the book of Genesis. Paine was a controversial philosopher and writer, but his writings did find a fairly large audience in America – especially in the intelligentsia. For example, some famous American deists include: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and Ben Franklin. These men all believed that God created the universe and controlled it through his providential care… but, somehow still did not allow for God’s intermittent use of *blatantly* miraculous events. Frankly, that has always baffled me. Even today, there are many people that somehow can believe that God created the entire Universe, *and* that he miraculously influences worldly events via his providential care… yet, say that they do not believe that he ever uses more blatantly miraculous events on occasion. I have had people tell me that it is simply not possible for God to go against the laws of nature. Why not? God made and introduced these laws into nature and if he wants to occasionally intervene in the world and change for a moment one or more of these laws, so be it… he certainly has the power and authority to do so. In fact, history is replete with reports of events of this type. Of course, this form of miraculous event is not the rule, but just because a person has not witnessed something that is obviously rare (an amazing, supernatural miracle) does not mean that they do not occur.

The fascination with Deism peaked around the end of the 18th century and into the first couple of decades of the 19th century. Although it still had its adherents as the mid-19th century approached, something far more injurious to Christianity was to make its appearance with the publication by Darwin of his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. In this treatise, the theory that he espoused put doubts in the minds of some concerning the credibility of the Bible’s account of the creation of the universe and life. Simply put, this theory stated in Darwin’s own words that ***"Variation is a feature of natural populations and every population produces more progeny than its environment can manage. The consequences of this overproduction is that those individuals with the best genetic fitness for the environment will produce offspring that can more successfully compete in that environment. Thus the subsequent generation will have a higher representation of these offspring and the population will have evolved."* With enough time, a one celled organism would evolve into all of the living things that have ever existed on earth … including mankind. Within a relatively shor**t period of time, the scientific community had accepted his theory as being true… i.e., a fact.

By the end of the 19th century and into the first half of the 20th, many people were letting this new “theory” affect their faith in the Bible and God. Far too many people began to jump on the evolution “band wagon.” People were looked upon as being simple-minded or ignorant if they did not accept this new “truth” of science. The Scopes Trial of 1925 added fuel to this fire. Those that refused to accept evolution as truth were branded as ignorant, un-educated, bigoted bumpkins by the majority of academia. This stigma tended to make many individuals drift into atheism as they felt that evolution was significant evidence that the Bible was simply not true. If it was not true regarding the important topic of origins, why should they trust any of its pronouncements? Still others tried to make Christianity fit into this new way of viewing the world… there are still many of these theistic evolutionists who believe that God used evolution to bring about his creation of the universe and the plants, animals, and humans therein. Many fine Christians fell into this group… I believe from some of his early writings that C.S. Lewis was one of these adherents. However, as he grew older and wiser, he recognized that evolution did not square with the biblical account. Even in the latter years of his life (around 1950-1963) there was nowhere near the evidence against evolution that now exists. So, Lewis simply recognized the fallacy in macroevolution by faith in God and the Bible more than anything else. That is all the reason anyone needs.

Sadly, the people that drifted into atheism or theistic evolution were showing a major lack of faith in God and his Word… and, of course, they were wrong. However, let me be clear here, I do not put those who believe in God using evolution to bring forth his creation in the same category as an atheist. I believe both are wrong in their belief concerning creation, but one group may still be going to heaven (depending on their faith in Jesus)… the other is, sadly, not.

So where does the scientific world stand on this topic of creation and evolution today? First, let us take a look at the topic of “creation out of nothing.” At the beginning of the 20th century, many scientists accepted the view that we lived in an “oscillating universe” or a “steady state universe.” In other words, in their opinion, the universe has always existed. For instance, Einstein was of this belief. The Hindus have always believed this way. Of course, this is not the biblical account. Then, two intriguing things took place within a decade of one another. In 1916, Einstein published his General Theory of Relativity. Along with many other things, these equations gave information (mathematically) concerning how our universe came into being. Alexander Friedmann and Georges Lemaitre, two great mathematicians, solved these equations in the early 1920s, and showed that *the universe had a beginning* and was currently expanding! A few years later, Edwin Hubble used a telescope to also show that our universe was expanding… as predicted by Einstein’s equations. All of this information pointed to the fact that the universe had been created at some point in the past… it had not always existed. Einstein recognized that this fact made necessary the existence of a Creator… and he was not too proud to call this Creative force God. Prior to his recognition of the significance of his General Theory of Relativity and Hubble’s discoveries, Einstein had been an atheist. So, since the early 1920s, we know that the biblical account of creation is consistent with secular science… and the Hindu idea of an eternal universe is not. Let me move next to the topic of evolution.

Sadly, scientists who reject the theory of macroevolution are often ostracized and may well have their professional career and livelihood adversely affected by intolerant colleagues. Some have lost their jobs as professors, etc. Yet even Darwin himself, to his credit, pointed out that his idea was very lacking in evidence. He noted that it would likely take decades and decades of searching to find the transitional forms that must exist if what he proposed was more than just an interesting fallacy. In fact, ***Darwin clearly pointed out that if these transitional organisms were not found the world would have to reject his whole concept of evolution by natural selection.*** So, how has the scientific community done with respect to finding these “missing links?”

Harvard’s Stephen Gould, a world leading evolutionist, noted, “The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of palaeontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches … in any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the gradual transformation of its ancestors; it appears all at once and “fully formed.”’

Dr. Colin Patterson, senior paleontologist of the British Museum of Natural History said, “I’m speaking on two subjects, evolutionism and creationism, and I believe it’s true to say that I know nothing whatever about either … One of the reasons I started taking this anti-evolutionary view, well, let’s call it non-evolutionary, was last year I had a sudden realisation. ‘… One morning I woke up … and it struck me that I had been working on this stuff [evolution] for twenty years, and there was not one thing I knew about it.’ He added: ‘That was quite a shock that one could be misled for so long … I’ve tried putting a simple question to various people and groups of people: **“Can you tell me anything you know about evolution, any one thing that you think is true?”** I tried that question on the geology staff in the Field Museum of Natural History, and the only answer I got was silence. I tried it on the members of the Evolutionary Morphology Seminar in the University of Chicago … and all I got there was silence for a long time, and then eventually one person said: **“Yes, I do know one thing. It ought not to be taught in high school.’”**

Frankly, over the last 40-50 years many other serious objections to macroevolution have been discovered.[**macroevolution** is evolution on a scale of separated gene pools. macro evolutionary studies focus on change that occurs at or above the level of species, in contrast with microevolution, which refers to smaller evolutionary changes… taking place within a species or population.] There have been many excellent books written that explain why Darwin’s conception of human life evolving from earlier forms of life [i.e. macroevolution] simply did not take place. Let me just briefly mention a few pieces of evidence against macroevolution:

* The marked lack of transitional forms mentioned above – there should have been millions of these discovered in the 150 years since Darwin presented his hypothesis… very few, if any, real transitional forms have been found.
* Now that biologists understand the microcellular level of life, they realize that there are many complex organs (e.g. the eye) and systems (e.g. blood clotting system) that would have required 10-20 simultaneous mutations in an animal if produced via macroevolution. These organs or systems are referred to as being *irreducibly complex*. The number of mutations required to make a working human blood clotting system or a system as complex as the human visual system could not occur via tiny mutations over thousands of generations because the individual parts of these systems give no advantage to the animal (e.g. who needs a clear cornea if there is no retina? Why do people need tears to lubricate their cornea if it is to no advantage to be clear and smooth? etc., etc.) In just a few minutes of time thinking about the complex visual system of man, I came up with twenty-five different aspects of this system, each one of which would have required at least one mutation to come into being (most would have required more than one). Yet, it is totally absurd to believe that the required number of mutations could occur simultaneously. Remember, the visual system in humans is irreducibly complex and just having five, or ten, or even fifteen of the parts to the system (which would have required a minimum of 5, 10, or 15 simultaneous mutations) would not even had resulted in a working visual system. It is interesting to note that even Darwin recognized that the human visual system was not consistent with his concept of evolution. Note his comment on this topic “To suppose that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree." (Charles Darwin, "On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life," 1859, p. 155) Hence, the conclusion is that macroevolution was not how humans, or other life, came into being. There are many excellent examples of these irreducibly complex systems discussed in detail in many books today.
* After over 100 years of intense human effort in breeding plants and animals, no one has been able to create any significant variation in any species… yet, we are supposed to believe that pure chance created all of the amazing variety of species that have lived on the earth over time.
* It is very difficult to explain how the incredible **instincts** that are seen in so many birds and animals could have developed via evolution. Frankly, it is impossible to explain.
* Many believe that the greatest problem for the macroevolutionist to explain is the issue of how the very first life form came to be. Many efforts have been undertaken to estimate the probability of life coming from random forces of nature. Kofahl and Segraves noted that Harold Morowitz, an evolutionist, calculated that the probability was one chance in 10 340,000,000. This is a ludicrously low probability. Think about it… this is the fraction of 1 over 10 with 340 million zeros after it! In the world of statistics, the likelihood of an event with this low of a probability actually happening is considered to be ZERO. Yet, because these scientists refuse to allow God into their thinking, they still say that it must have happened!

There has been a torrent of discoveries in recent decades that put the hypothesis of evolution in its proper place.., in the trash heap of history. Amazingly, however, our flamingly liberal, secular society still will not allow this important information that refutes macroevolution to be taught in the American school system. Also, sadly, our school system is not teaching our students that the current scientific concept of creation is perfectly consistent with the biblical account. They are literally afraid of the consequences… that the truth does indeed point to a creator God. Secular society does not want this truth to be revealed.

In conclusion, I must remind the reader that if ever science has a theory or idea that is obviously contrary to what the Bible teaches, then the Bible is correct and Christian scientists should use this biblical truth to look and see why that current false scientific idea is incorrect. Today, it just so happens that the most up to date scientific ideas about creation are consistent with the Bible… yet, we must remember that this was not the case at the onset of the 20th century. Remember, at that time secular scientists had embraced macroevolution and many had also held to the idea of an oscillating, always existing universe. They were wrong, the Bible was correct. However, it took a while for new discoveries to make this clear. Even now, political and secular humanistic reasons are keeping the real truth about evolution from reaching the masses.

1. **Doctrine of Miracles:**

Miracles can be defined in more than one way. Wayne Gruden defines a miracle as “*a less common kind of God’s activity in which he arouses people’s awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.*” I believe that the type of miracle that most people think about when the term is used would best be defined as *God’s intervention into the world to cause an event that is beyond the capability of the known laws of nature to produce*. Note that this latter kind of event (i.e. an obvious supernatural miracle) does require some additional supernatural intervention. I also believe that it is important to point out that God has used different types of these supernatural interventions (miracles) in history:

* God sometimes uses *amazing supernatural miracles* where there is no doubt that he has intervened to create an event that could not possibly have been produced without superseding the laws of nature. Jesus turning water into wine and his raising Lazarus from the dead are both good examples of this type of miracle.
* God often intervenes in nature to produce miraculous events, including the curing of diseases, but does so *using more subtle methods*. This type of miracle may involve God working in such a way that some may not even note that he is behind the miracle. For example, in the Six-Day War of 1967, there were incredible events that took place that allowed Israel to win that war where all the odds were stacked against them. Movies and books have been written about many of these amazing events. Yet, it was not obvious that any laws of nature were superseded to accomplish any of these amazing outcomes. Theoretically, these multiple fortuitous events could all have been just amazing coincidences. The Bible also tells us to pray for others, including for healing from disease. When Peter was released from prison through the prayers of his Christian friends as noted in Acts 12, it was a miracle… it stimulated those people and others to recognize God’s heavenly intervention with awe and wonder. Certainly there are instances when, after concerted prayer, people have incredible cures from doctor diagnosed terminal metastatic cancer. Christians properly give the credit to God’s intervention and answer to prayer. This is one form of miracle. Yet, since on rare occasions cancers can have remarkable remissions and cures, non-Christians would most likely call these types of cures fortuitous coincidences. So although I believe that these types of miracles involve just as much Godly intervention as the ‘blatantly supernatural’ miracles, they *do not obviously* involve God injecting a super-addition to the recognized laws of nature.
* The longer I have lived, the more convinced I have become of *God’s providential intervention* into his world. God has a plan for everyone and everything in the world and through incredibly subtle (at times), omniscient, and omnipotent intervention God is able to work out things to make sure that his will is done. Frankly, God exercises supernatural intervention every minute of every day in order to fulfill his purposes. Since this must involve intervention into the world to cause events that otherwise might not have occurred via the natural course of nature, this providential care can be referred to as miraculous. Much more will be discussed concerning this concept of God’s providence later.

**The purpose of miracles**:

The Bible describes miracles by using the words *sign, wonder, and power*. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, miracles were used by God to:

1. Demonstrate his *power* and therefore to show that he was the one true God. He did this in both the Old and New Testaments.
2. To *glorify* God
3. In the New Testament, Jesus performed miracles to demonstrate that he was sent by God, his Father, and that he was the Son of God. Recall that Nicodemus said “*we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him*.” (John 3:2) Many miracles were also *signs* to demonstrate certain truths (e.g. that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God) “*it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,* ***22****And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.*” (Luke 3:21-22)
4. Later on, the apostles were given the power to perform miracles to attest to their being sent by God to evangelize the world and teach the world about Jesus. For example, the book of Acts records many miracles performed by Peter (e.g. Acts 3:6-9 describing Peter healing a lame beggar) and Paul (he performed multiple healings and raised people from the dead through the power of God) and the other apostles (“*Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.”* (Acts 5:12)).
5. Miracles bear witness to the fact that the kingdom of God has come and has begun to help people in a variety of ways… especially through healing.
6. Miracles are also used to show that some people are special spokespeople for God.

**Are miracles meant for today?**

There is a difference in opinion among fine Christian theologians as to whether God uses miracles in the world today. Oddly, even those theologians who believe that the age of miracles went out with the death of the apostles, or soon thereafter, still typically believe in the power of prayer to change outcomes. They would pray for their loved ones who are in need. They would thank God for healings that they witness subsequent to those prayers. That being the case, it sure seems to me that these men and women of God actually do believe that miracles can and do happen in our world today. Yet, they seemingly do not happen with anywhere near the frequency as one would have witnessed had one had the opportunity to follow Paul or Peter along in their ministry… but, they still do happen at times. It seems quite clear that astounding supernatural miracles do not take place very often in the U.S.A. However, I suggest that they likely take place much more frequently in places that lack for knowledge of Jesus. In those places, it would make sense that God would use these types of miracles more frequently for the same reasons he did so during the times of the apostles… to demonstrate the veracity of the gospel message and to prove that missionaries are his emissaries.

Without doubt, virtually every Christian theologian recognizes that God uses his providential care to shape the course of human events… this has to be done via miraculous input. God simply cannot rely on the laws of nature and pure chance to work out his specific plans for this world. Therefore, miracles do take place today… we should pray for them when we have proper reasons to do so… in times of true need, to confirm the gospel, to bring glory to God, to help various Christian ministries, etc.

**Why do some believe that miracles cannot occur?**

Interestingly, as I mentioned when writing about creation, some people actually believe that miracles are a logical impossibility. Benedict Spinoza believed this, and here is the gist of his argument as summarized nicely by Norman Geisler in his *Systematic Theology* text…:

1. Miracles are violations of natural law.
2. Natural laws are immutable (absolute and unalterable).
3. It is impossible to violate immutable laws.
4. Therefore, miracles are impossible.

The fallacy with this argument is found in his assertion that natural laws are immutable. It simply is not true that the God that created the universe and the natural laws that the universe generally are governed by, cannot intervene at his own discretion, at any time, and either alter one or more of those laws temporarily, or add some other natural “law” in order to perform a miracle (an event that would not be possible unless some atypical operation was added to the normally operating natural laws of the universe). For instance, Jesus could have walked on water by miraculously making the surface tension of the water temporarily able to support his weight wherever he stepped on the water. Jesus could have simply commanded the water molecules to change into wine molecules in order to change the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. No big deal, Jesus made all of the molecules that exist… and he has power over all of them.

Another famous philosopher who did not believe that miracles were possible was David Hume. His argument was essentially as follows:

1. Miracles would be a violation of natural law, and if they exist, they are rare occurrences.
2. Experience has shown mankind that natural laws are stable and unalterable (since Hume had not known anyone who had witnessed any miracle, that was his conclusion) and of regular occurrence.
3. The evidence for the regular is always better than for the rare.
4. A wise man should use this information to come to reasonable conclusions.
5. Since no one can document that an event has occurred that violated natural laws, miracles must not exist.

Hume is simply saying that since he has not heard enough evidence to know that a miracle has occurred (in his opinion), they have not ever occurred and never will occur. This is really a very weak argument. If a person living in deepest Africa in the early 20th century had never seen an airplane, using Hume logic he should come to the conclusion that air flight had never occurred nor would it ever occur. Of course, just because some event (e.g. a miracle) is rare and not witnessed by all people, does not mean that it (i.e. a miracle) has never happened nor will ever happen.

The simple fact is that miracles do exist. God sometimes uses amazing supernatural miracles to accomplish his will. Much more often, God uses his incredible miraculous power in a providential way – working through people and things in a much more subtle way, but also to accomplish his overarching plan for our world and his people. We are told by God to pray, to communicate with him every day and throughout each day. It is certainly appropriate to ask God to intervene in our lives and others to help accomplish those tasks that we know are in the will of God. Sometimes this may require God to perform a miracle. So be it… that is not a problem for our God.

1. **The Doctrine of the Trinity:**

The first two topics just discussed established that Christian doctrine states that the eternally existent God created the universe and everything within it at a specific point in time in the distant past. Of course, this was a miracle of the greatest magnitude, and God has been performing miracles of one form or another ever since. Now, it is appropriate to discuss this transcendent God, and attempt to detail what the Bible reveals about him. It is very important and should be a goal for every Christian to know all that he/she can about God. One of the more intriguing things that the Bible reveals about God is that he is a Triune God. Although there is only one God, he does exist in three distinct persons. Although the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, the fact that God does exist in three persons is noted in Scripture, very clearly, as will be shown. The church father, Tertullian (A.D. 155 – 220), first used the term Trinity when referencing God.

The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) concluded that Jesus was one and the same substance as God the Father. The Word, incarnate in Jesus, is God himself. Jesus is fully and eternally God. This Council was convened primarily to discuss the views of Arius of Alexandria. He taught that Jesus, God the Son, was created by God the Father at one point in the past. Arius also taught that the Holy Spirit had not eternally existed. Arianism was condemned at this Council. The Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) recognized the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as an equal partner of the Godhead. These councils were important to the growth of Christianity as they codified the appropriate beliefs of a Christian onto documents, creeds, and eventually into the New Testament. With the codification of the New Testament, Christians have had the opportunity to study the Scriptures and verify that their beliefs are consistent with God’s Word. In fact, it is very important that Christians do this. There are far too many false teachers in the world today and far too many people have followed one false gospel or another.

Let me now try to define the Trinity. First, it must be recognized that there is one and only one eternal God. However, God exists as three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit… each is fully God. The *essence* of these three persons is the same. However, the Father is not the Son. The Son is certainly not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Father. Each person of the Holy Trinity has a different role to play. Obviously, the Trinity is a mystery that cannot be fully understood but should certainly be accepted.

Throughout history, there have been various misconceptions of the Trinity. For example, Arianism and many other false religions have denied that Jesus Christ is fully God. Tritheism is the belief that there are three Gods in the Godhead. Modalism is a belief system that states that God is only one person, but can appear in different modes at different times, depending on the situation. These are just a few of the misconceptions on the topic of the Trinity.

The idea of the Trinity is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For example, in the book of Genesis, God said, “*let us make man in our image, after our likeness*.” (Gen 1:26) Just a little later, God said “*Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.”*(Gen 3:22) And again, “*Let us go down and there confound their language*.” (Gen 11:7) Virtually all Bible commentators point out that all three persons of the Trinity are referenced in Isaiah where it says… “*Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time it came to be, I* (God the Father) *have been there." And now the Lord God has sent me* (Jesus)*, and his Spirit* (Holy Spirit).” (Isaiah 48:16) There are many other examples in the Old Testament where it is quite obvious that two or three members of the Trinity are discussing a particular situation between themselves. Another example, a little different type, is found in the Psalms: “*The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’"* (Psalms 110:1) Jesus interprets this for us in the 22nd chapter of Matthew. In these verses, we see that David is pointing out that the day will come when God the Father will have his Son, Jesus Christ, sit at his right hand.

The New Testament has even more examples of the Trinity than those found in the Old Testament. When Jesus was baptized, the Bible states that “*the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and low, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased*.’” (Matt 3:16-17) Impressively enough, this episode in the life of Jesus, shows all three persons of the Trinity; Jesus is there being baptized in the Jordan River, God the Father is speaking from heaven above concerning how pleased he is with his son, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit appears like a dove and lands on Jesus to identify the Son as someone extremely special. Jesus clearly speaks of the Trinity, just before he was to return to heaven when he told his apostles to “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the* ***Father*** *and of the* ***Son*** *and of the* ***Holy Spirit****, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matt 28:19-20) Let me mention one more place in the New Testament that clearly refers to the Trinity… Paul concluded his letter to the Corinthians with “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* (2 Cor 13:14)

Each person of the Holy Trinity has many attributes in common, but they also have certain attributes that distinguish them… soon to be discussed in detail. Let me summarize the attributes of the Trinity in the following way:

* The Trinity consists of one mighty God, having one essence. Although God is one being, he exists eternally in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person of the Godhead is fully God.
* Consubstantiality: one divine substance is shared completely by each member of the Trinity. All share the same essence. Each of the three Divine persons is eternal, omnipotent, and co–equal.
* Perichoresis: each member of the Trinity has a perfectly loving interrelationship, partnership, and mutual dependence on one another. Many believe it best defined by St. John of Damascus: "The subsistences [i.e., the three Persons] dwell and are established firmly in one another. For they are inseparable and cannot part from one another, but keep to their separate courses within one another, without coalescing or mingling, but cleaving to each other. For the Son is in the Father and the Spirit: and the Spirit in the Father and the Son: and the Father in the Son and the Spirit, but there is no coalescence or commingling or confusion. And there is one and the same motion: for there is one impulse and one motion of the three subsistences, which is not to be observed in any created nature." Jesus suggested this concept of the Trinity when he said, *“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me"* (John 14:10a, 11).
* Each person of the Trinity has a particular role to play in creation and in the subsequent directing of that creation. These roles apparently were set in eternity past and are not interchangeable. The Father has always been the Father and had the role of the Father. Jesus, the Son has always assumed his position and role as the Son and the same is true with the role and position of the Holy Spirit. These different functions of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will be discussed as this treatise on the doctrines of the Christian Church continues.

1. **The Doctrine of God:**

Christian doctrine, as has just been pointed out, recognizes the fact that there is only one God – one God who exists in three persons in the mystery of the Trinity. God is of one essence – each person of the Trinity has that same essence. In this section, I will list the many names given to God in the Bible and then document many very important attributes of God – certainly knowledge of God’s names and attributes are important if we are to gain an understanding of exactly who he is and to recognize his amazing capabilities. Once this doctrine of God is explained, our attention will be turned to a study of the unique attributes of each person of the Trinity.

**Names of God (mostly found in Old Testament)**

* **Elohim – God (strong one) plural form of El – refers to God’s power**
* **El Yon - the most high and powerful God**
* **El Olam – everlasting God**
* **El Roi – the powerful one who sees**
* **El Shaddai – Lord God Almighty (God gives himself this name in his covenant relationship with Abraham) – relates to his ability to nourish and satisfy (shaddai – breasted one)**
* **Adonai – Lord, Master (Majesty)**
* **Jehovah (Yahweh) (YHWH) – self-existent one and God of the covenant**
  + - **Jireh (the Lord will provide)**
    - **Nissi (the Lord, my banner)**
    - **Shalom (the Lord is peace)**
    - **Sabbaoth (the Lord of hosts)**
    - **Maccaddeshem (the Lord my sanctifier)**
    - **Rohi (the Lord my shepherd)**
    - **Tsidkenu (the Lord my righteousness)**
    - **Shammah (the Lord who is present)**
    - **Rapha (the Lord our healer)**
  + **Abba – Jesus called his Father this name on occasion – means Daddy or Papa**

**Fifty Names of Jesus Christ (God the Son)**

* **Immanuel**
* **Advocate**
* **Alpha and Omega**
* **Bright Morning Star**
* **Messiah (Christ)**
* **Beloved Son**
* **Branch**
* **Bread of Life**
* **Chief Shepherd**
* **Door**
* **Wonderful**
* **Counselor**
* **Everlasting Father**
* **Prince of Peace**
* **Mighty God**
* **Great High Priest**
* **Good Shepherd**
* **Heir of all Things**
* **Holy One of God**
* **Horn of Salvation**
* **Jesus**
* **King of Kings**
* **King of the Jews**
* **I Am**
* **The Just One**
* **Seed of the Woman**
* **Lamb of God**
* **Light of the World**
* **Lion of the Tribe of Judah**
* **Man of Sorrows**
* **Mediator**
* **Lord of Lords**
* **Prince of Peace**
* **Rock**
* **Chief Cornerstone**
* **Root of David**
* **Resurrection and Life**
* **Rose of Sharon**
* **Redeemer**
* **The Way**
* **Son of Man**
* **Savior**
* **Shiloh**
* **Son of David**
* **Son of God**
* **True Vine**
* **The Truth**
* **Word of God**
* **The Word**
* **The Nazarene**

**The Holy Spirit (names)**

* **The Comforter**
* **Spirit of God**
* **Spirit of Christ**
* **Eternal Spirit**
* **Spirit of Truth**
* **Spirit of Grace**
* **Spirit of Glory**
* **Spirit of Life**
* **Spirit of Revelation and Wisdom**
* **Spirit of Promise**
* **Spirit of Adoption**
* **Spirit of Holiness**
* **Spirit of Faith**

**Symbols of the Holy Spirit**

* **Dove (purity, peace)**
* **Water (life)**
* **Oil (indicating anointing for service)**
* **A seal (of our future salvation)**
* **Wind (unseen power)**
* **Fire (protection, power, purifying, judgment)**
* **Earnest (as in “earnest money”)**

**Attributes of God**

Wayne Gruden, in his excellent book *Systematic Theology*, breaks down the attributes of God into two categories – those characteristics that God does not share in any meaningful way with man, and those attributes of God that he shares in some fashion with his creation, mankind. Many theologians have pointed out that this method of classification is not perfect, as there is some degree of overlap with some of these attributes, but it is still considered a very good way to categorize and organize the characteristics of God. Classically, the breakdown has been to divide God’s attributes into those that are ***incommunicable*** (unique to God) and those that are ***communicable*** (has some similarity to an attribute of man). Let’s take a look at them now:

**Incommunicable Attributes of God: God is…**

1. **Independent (Aseity):** Simply put, God needs nothing from his creation, including man, to be complete. He exists totally in and of himself. Nothing else contributed to his existence. This attribute is sometimes known as his self-existence or his aseity. Consider the fact that if God did require anything else, he would be someone in need… someone less than perfect. The Bible points out, this attribute in the book of Acts, “*the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands,* ***as though he needed anything****, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything.*” (Acts 17:24-25) It is interesting to consider the fact that the three distinct persons of the Trinity certainly provide all of the fellowship that God could, or would, ever need. Although it is definitely true that God does not need anything from his creation, it is still a wonderful truth that our existence proves that he chose to fellowship with mankind and chose to allow us to please and glorify him.
2. **Pure actuality: “***I am who I am*.” (Ex. 3:14) This verse suggests strongly the fact that God has no potential to become anything other than what he has always been. Every baby born into this world has potential… maybe they one day will be a great scientist, maybe a great athlete. Much depends on how hard they work and the inherent abilities that God gave them at birth. However, our eternal God has absolutely no potential to become anything better or worse than what he is as time passes. ‘He is who he is’ and who he has always been - he happens to be perfect and always will be. He had no possibility to not exist or be anything other than what he is now. For one thing, the universe, a created entity, requires an everlasting God. Logic demands that our ‘caused’ universe had an ‘uncaused’ Creator. God has no cause for his existence. Obviously, this requires that he not be actualized… i.e. caused… by another. God simply exists, and always has existed, in his completed form.
3. **Simple (Unity):** Simple is defined as being without parts. God is said to be *simple*, because he is not capable of being divided in any manner. For example, God does not have any one attribute that takes precedence over another. For example, God is totally love, God is completely immutable, God is completely eternal, God is completely wise, God is omnipresent, etc., etc. There is also only one God – this is what the term *unity* implies. Although his essence is one of unity, God still can be viewed as consisting of three persons… The Trinity. Why? Because, as mentioned earlier, each person of the Trinity has the same essence. “*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one*.” (Mark 12:29) “*Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?”* (Mal 2:10)
4. **Necessary:** God is a Being who must exist. That is the definition of a necessary Being. God did not have to exist. However, the fact that we live in a created universe and some thing or someone had to create our universe does make it necessary that God exists. The universe had to come from someone. Therefore, that someone had to exist and had to be eternal. If the creator of our universe was not eternal then someone would have had to create him/it. At some point, there had to be a necessary, eternal, self-existent being to create the universe in which we live. That being we call God. That necessary being, God, must have existed always; he has existed throughout all eternity and always will exist. Norman Geisler states it in the following way: a necessary Being, is:
5. a Being whose nonexistence is not possible
6. a Being whose existence is essential
7. a Being whose essence is to exist
8. a Being whose essence and existence are identical

Geisler capitalizes “Being” because a being such as this would have to be God. There are many Bible verses that show the necessity of God. For example, “*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”(Col 1:17) “*All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* (John 1:3)

1. **Immutable:** God is unchangeable in his essence. Wayne Grudem explains this immutable old nature of God as follows: “God is unchanging in his being, perfections, purposes, and promises, yet God does act and feel emotions, and he acts and feels differently in response to different situations.” If God could change, this would mean he could get better or get worse. Of course, this is impossible. “*For I the Lord do not change; therefore, you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed*.” (Mal 3:6) “*My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose… I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.*” (Isa. 46:10-11) God tells us throughout the Bible that when he speaks, he means what he says. If he says something will come to pass, it will come to pass. It is true that there are some Bible passages that have caused some people to question God’s immutability. They wonder if God really does never change his mind. In order to understand better the handful of passages that have created this question in the minds of some, it is important to understand at least two things: the Bible must always be looked at in its entirety, and its verses need to be interpreted in context, if it is to be understood properly, and we also must recognize that many times the Bible uses words anthropomorphically when talking about attributes of God. For instance, the Bible says God “repented” on a few occasions. Now, this certainly does not mean that God is sorry for some sin that he committed. Nor does it mean he arbitrarily changed his mind for no apparent reason. Most commentators believe these instances should best be an interpreted in the following manner: because a particular situation changed, God’s intention concerning that situation also changed… and that was always his plan. For example, when God sent Jonah into the city of Nineveh to tell them he was going to destroy their wicked city in 40 days, that is what God *would have* done if they did not repent and turn toward him. However, the King and his nobles did turn to God with the following hope: “*Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."* ***10****When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it*.” (Jonah 3:9-10) Bible scholar, John McArthur, states when explaining verses such as the verses above and those in Exodus 32:9-14 (where God relented from severely punishing the wickedly acting Israelites after Moses pleaded with him) where God threatens judgment, but does not decree it, McArthur feels that they are conditional and do not bind God to a particular course of action. It is analogous to a father telling a child that he is going to come right on into their room and punish them for carrying on so loudly. Then, when that same parent gets there, and the children are then sitting quietly doing their homework and pleading about how sorry they are, the dad leaves the room without handing out the punishment. *That was the father’s plan all along*… not a change of his mind. However, if the kids were still acting up, the punishment would have been meted out. If Nineveh had not repented, God would have destroyed that city. Of course, God always knew that the king of Nineveh and Moses were going to do what they did… and God always knew that he was not going to carry out his threats in those instances. Those threats were, in essence, “attention getters.” In summary, God always knows what he is going to do in any situation, and he never will alter his actions - never. He is unchangeable.
2. **Eternal:** God created the universe at a certain point of time in the past. Anything that has a cause, such as our universe, is not eternal. God is eternal – no one caused him to come into existence. God has no beginning and God has no end. In fact, God sees all time equally. God existed before time existed. That is certainly an extremely difficult concept to understand, but it is true. I certainly cannot conceive of what it was like before our universe and time began. Be that as it may, God was eternally existent prior to his creation of the universe. In some mysterious way, God is timeless; apparently he does not experience the world as a succession of events in time, one after the other… to him, they are all timeless events. He sees the end from the beginning. He exists outside of the constraints of time. Obviously, that makes it possible for him to prophesy with 100% accuracy. Of course, this characteristic as well as the others under discussion makes his providential care possible. There are many verses in the Bible that speak to this attribute. “*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God*.” (Psalm 90:2) “*‘I and the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*.” (Rev. 1:8) Jesus helps us understand this concept to some degree when he said, “*before Abraham was, I am*.” (John 8:58)
3. **Infinite:** God is without boundaries and beyond the limits of his created universe. He is not subject to any limitations at all. Anything he desires to accomplish, he can accomplish unless it is a logical impossibility (e.g. he can’t create a rock heavier than he can lift). Everything God possesses, he possesses in infinite supply. *“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit*.”(Ps 147:5) “*Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave – what can you know?”* (Job 11:7-8) “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*.” (Isa. 55:8-9) We also will note after discussing over a score of God’s other attributes, that God possesses each of these attributes in an infinite manner (all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, …).
4. **Omnipresent:** God is present everywhere. God is not limited in any fashion by space and his entire being, and essence, is everywhere at all times. A particularly good verse that shows this is found in Jeremiah, “*Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord*.” (Jer. 23:23-24) “*In him all things hold together.*” (Col 1:17) The psalmist knew that there was nowhere in the entire universe or beyond that one could go and be away from God’s presence, “*Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?* ***8****If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!* ***9****If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,* ***10****even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me*.” (Ps 139:7-10)
5. **Immaterial (Spirit):** God is spirit. God is not composed of matter. When God created the universe, he created matter and energy. God, however, existing throughout all eternity, has always been and always will be totally spirit. There are many verses in the Bible that address the fact that God is spirit. “*For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse* .” (Rom 1:20) “*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*” (John 4:24) “*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever*.” (1 Tim 1:17) There are other, scientific, reasons why God must be spirit. We recognize that the majority of his incommunicable attributes cannot exist if God were made of matter and energy. For example, since matter and energy always have the potential to change, and God is pure actuality, God must be immaterial. We also know that God is eternal - that is, God is not temporal. Temporal entities exist in space in a material world since there is no time without space and matter. Hence, God, who is eternal, must therefore be nonmaterial, i.e. pure spirit. Of course, this attribute of God was voluntarily surrendered by the second person of the Trinity when he was incarnated.

**Communicable Attributes of God: God is….**

1. **Perfect:** This is a pretty easy attribute to understand. It is impossible to be better than perfect – and God is perfect. There is no quality that God lacks, and there is nothing about God that could be improved upon. Whatever God does is perfect. David said, “His way is perfect.” (Ps. 18:30) Jesus, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, told us that we “must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48) This attribute also implies that Jesus has every attribute that is required for him to be perfect… because he is perfect.
2. **Love:** God desires the best for his creation and gives of himself in order to bring blessings to others. The fact that God gave humans free will demonstrates the fact that God desires a love relationship between humans and himself. If this were not important to him, he could have created humans to act as robots and instilled within each no ability other than to “act” like they “loved” their creator. Of course, this would not be true love. The only possible way to know whether someone loves another is to give them the opportunity to hate or reject that other individual - that is where free will, comes into play. Of course, giving free will to humans creates all sorts of other possibilities, many of which are very difficult and upsetting to deal with – because this free will inevitably leads to sin and its consequences. However, God chose this course for his creation. So, I suggest that this is the best decision that could have been made since God makes no mistakes. There are many, many Bible verses that reveal God’s love for us. Maybe the most relevant in the context of this subject matter is found in the book of 1 John, “*Anyone who does not love does not know God, God is love*.” (1 John 4:8) My favorite verse on this subject is, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believe it than him shall not perish but have everlasting life*.” (John 3:16) There are dozens of other verses in the Bible that demonstrate God’s unending love for his creation, and his ultimate plan for those who love him – to allow them to spend an eternity in a heavenly paradise with him. More incredibly, he demonstrated his infinite love by sacrificing himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, on the cross in order to provide for those who will simply trust in Jesus the opportunity and the certainty of salvation.
3. **Good:** The Bible tells us that God is the source of all that is good in the world. God’s goodness manifests itself in some of his other attributes, such as his love for his creation and his mercy. Everything that God does is very, very good. We see examples of this in the first chapter of the Bible… “*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*” (Gen 1:31) God certainly is the only perfectly good “being” - Jesus told us that when he said “*No one is good but God alone*.” (Luke 18:19) Of course, most people have some goodness in them, but only God is truly *good*. It has been a great comfort to me to know that “…*for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*.” (Romans 8:28) God’s omnipotence makes it possible for him to work through his providential care to make sure that all events in the lives of those who love and trust in him will eventually work together for good.
4. **Omnipotent (Sovereign):** God is all-powerful and able to do anything he desires that is consistent with his holy will. “*With God nothing will be impossible*.” (Luke 1:37) Jesus put it another way, when he said “*With God all things are possible*.” (Matt. 19:26) It is true, however, that God cannot do anything logically impossible nor can he do anything that is against his own character. In other words, God certainly cannot do anything that would not be considered holy or just. That is simply not in his character. “*It is impossible for God to lie*.” (Heb. 6:18) “*God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*” (James 1:13) “*I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?*” (Jer. 32:27) Here, God asks a rhetorical question – the answer is “no,” nothing is impossible for God.

Many times, people refer to the fact that God is sovereign. Sovereignty refers to the manner in which God wields his omnipotence over creation in dealing with everything within his universe. God is in control of all things. Given the fact that God is perfect, omniscient, and love, it is certainly appropriate that he has total control over that creation… indeed, that he has total control over humanity.

1. **Light:** There are several places in the Bible that say that God is light. So, what does it mean to say that God is light? When the Bible speaks of light concerning God it is speaking of spiritual light. Darkness is a symbol for evil. Light is a symbol for truth and goodness. God’s light, if people will walk in it, will keep them safe and away from sin. The following are two verses that point to both of these concepts: *“God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* (1 John 1:5) *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12) If people will follow Jesus, the light of the world, they will have life… including eternal life in heaven. “*The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory*.” (Isaiah 60:19) Speaking of the final heaven, the Bible tells us that there will be no more night. “*They will not need the light of the lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light*.” (Rev 22:5)
2. **Majestic:** The Bible is replete with verses extolling the majesty of God. Majesty speaks of God’s greatness, his unparalleled power and glory, and his pre-eminent position as the one and only God of creation. God is absolutely worthy of our praise and should always be held in awe by his creation. Unfortunately, rarely do people, including Christians, hold God in proper awe – and recognize him for the majestic and loving Father and Creator that he is. The following are just a few examples of where the Bible points to God’s majesty… there are many more…

“*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens*.” (Psalms 8:1)

“*Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours*.” (1 Chron 29:11)

“*Out of the north comes golden splendor; God is clothed with awesome majesty.”* (Job 37:22)

*“Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your splendor and majesty!* ***4****In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness.”* (Ps. 45:4)

“… *all were astonished at the majesty of God.*” (Luke 9:43)

“*Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty.”* (Psalms 104:1)

1. **Blessed:** Wayne Grudem states that God is blessed. He writes that “God’s blessedness means that God delights fully in himself and in all that reflects his character.” In other words, God is perfectly happy and content with his eternal state. Paul wrote to Timothy and called God, “*the blessed and only Sovereign*.” (1 Tim 1:11) The word used blessed in this verse could be translated as “happy.” Obviously, since God can see the past, present and future at all times, he is happy about what the future holds for his creation. The future holds great things, and blessed things, for God and his creation. Isaiah noted, “*as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you*.” (Isaiah 62:5)
2. **Jealous:** Interestingly, the Bible says that God is a jealous God. At first blush, this seems like a bad attribute. Of course, since this is an attribute of God, it cannot be bad in his case. As it turns out, the word jealous does not always have a negative connotation. When Paul said, “*I feel a divine jealousy for you”* (2 Cor. 11:2), he was telling the Corinthians that he really felt protective towards them. In this sense, it has the meaning of being deeply committed to someone or something. God is certainly deeply committed to protecting his honor and his people. Of course, God knows that people should not be following false gods and committing sins. Therefore, he desires that worship be directed toward him… not false gods. Hence, he states, “*for I the Lord your God am a jealous God*.” (Ex. 20:5) Wayne Grudem writes, “God’s jealousy means that God seeks to protect his own honor.” It truly is proper to only honor and worship the one true, perfect, loving God of the universe. God is a jealous God, because he earnestly desires us to follow him. Any other god or entity that a human being would choose to follow would definitely be a very bad choice… and ultimately, eternally fatal.
3. **Righteous (Just):** God always does what is right. God’s actions are the standard of what is just and right. Moses said, *“All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he.”*(Deut. 32:4) *I the Lord speak the truth, I declare what is right.”*(Isa. 45:19)Therighteousness of Jesus is the basis for the believer’s rewards… ”*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”* (2 Tim 4:8)

*“Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.”* (Hebrews 1:8)

“*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you*.” (Psalms 89:14)

Since God is holy and righteous, he will not and cannot allow anyone who is not righteous into heaven. Everyone who is past the age of consent has sinned and fallen short of God’s required perfection. As will be discussed in much more detail later, God sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and then willingly sacrifice himself to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. Christ did live a sinless, righteous life and therefore was able to be the propitiation for our sins.

“*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God* (1 Peter 3:18)

“*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”* (Heb 4:15)

In summary, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – God is completely righteous, and completely just.

1. **Holy:** God is totally set apart from all evil; he is separated from sin and completely holy and honorable. God takes the time to remind mankind of the importance of being holy. God himself is the most holy one, called the *“Holy One of Israel*.” (Ps. 71:22) He had his chosen people, the Israelites, build the tabernacle, and then two different temples where they could engage in worship. The inner most room was referred to as the Holy of Holies. This is where the high priest would meet with God himself at appropriate times to seek forgiveness of sin for the chosen people. “*The Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy*.” (Ex 20:11) So we see that God set aside a certain day of each week, and a certain portion of his tabernacle and temple to be made holy. They were to be “set apart” from ordinary worldly tasks and from the evil/sin of the world and dedicated to God and to purity. Heaven is a holy place where God resides. Only people without the stain of sin will be allowed into a holy place… for example, heaven. That does present a serious problem for men and women. We cannot solve this problem without godly help. Fortunately, God provides that help. In fact, he provides everything people need for their salvation. He even provides the perfect sacrifice – in fact, he is that sacrifice.
2. **Order (Peace):** Grudem defines God’s peace as follows: God’s peace means that in God’s being and in his actions he is separate from all confusion and disorder, yet he is continuously active in innumerable well ordered, fully controlled, simultaneous actions. Paul told the Corinthians, “*God is not a God of confusion, but of peace*.” (1 Cor. 14:33) God’s plan for his people is to give them peace if they will only trust in him completely. That is the key… to trust and obey. As the great old hymn says, “trust and obey for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” “*The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace*.” (Psalms 29:11) We must keep our minds on Jesus in order to have peace. When he was about to leave his disciples and return to heaven, Jesus told them*… “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”* (John 14:27) Some twenty years later Paul told the people in the Roman church, “*For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”* (Romans 8:6) We all hope for *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.”* (Phil. 4:7)
3. **Mercy (Grace):** I have always been taught that the word grace, when used regarding what God offers mankind, means *unmerited favor* towards those who deserve punishment. I like that definition. Keep in mind that every sinner deserves punishment. When we speak of God’s grace we are getting to the heart of the gospel. Christians are saved because of God’s grace towards them. ”*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ***24*** *and are justified by his* ***grace*** *as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* ***25****whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”* (Romans 3:23-25) In fact, some of the most important verses in the Bible speak of God’s mercy and grace and the critical importance of each to our salvation. “*God, being rich in* ***mercy****, because of the great love with which he loved us,* ***5****even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by* ***grace*** *you have been saved—* ***6****and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ***7****so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* ***8****For by* ***grace*** *you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* ***9*** *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” (Eph 2:4-9) So we see that God has mercy towards those in distress and, through his grace, he decides not to give them the punishment that they deserve if they will only put their faith in his son, Jesus Christ, and his sacrificial death on the cross. Jesus even gives us the faith we need to believe. We can do absolutely nothing to earn our salvation… salvation is purely via God’s grace. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “*if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace*.” (Romans 11:6)

God is also the “*Father of mercies, and God of all comfort*.” (2 Cor. 1:3) “*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.* ***9****He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.* ***10****He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.* ***11****For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.”* (Psalms 103:8-11)

Throughout the four Gospels, Jesus is continuously healing the sick, and encouraging the poor and distressed. He is constantly demonstrating his mercy towards the people. Ultimately, this mercy led him to willingly give his life on the cross, as he shed his blood to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. We will speak on this topic in much more detail later in this treatise.

1. **Omniscient:** Simply put, God knows everything. This is well put by Elihu in the book of Job, when he refers to God as the one “*who is perfect in knowledge*.” (Job 37:16) “*God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything*.” (1 John 3:20) I think that the idea of how amazing it is to have an all-knowing God is found in Isaiah where he writes, “*I am God, and there is none like me,* ***10****declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,”* (Isaiah 46:9-10) Recognize that here we see that God literally knows exactly what has happened and what will happen from eternity past to eternity future. That covers it all! Not only that, but note that God will accomplish what he set out to do in eternity past. More on this topic concerning God’s providence later. Also remember that Jesus comforted us with these words, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.**30** But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.” (Matt 10:29-30) God knows exactly what each of our lives will be like even before we enter into the world, *“your eyes beheld my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”* (Ps. 139:16)
2. **Wise:** Given that God is omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent, it is certainly a wonderful thing that he is also all-wise. God’s wisdom is unlimited and perfect. He always makes the correct decisions and always gives the correct advice. “*With him are wisdom and might, he has counsel and understanding.*” (Job 12:13) “*O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways.”* (Rom 11:33) Of course, wisdom is a communicable attribute of God. People do have varying degrees of wisdom. I believe that the more we trust in the Lord and the more we study the Bible and the more we work towards our sanctification, the greater our wisdom will become. I’ve also told many an individual over the years that there is only one thing that gets better with age… and that is wisdom. We should become wiser as we age, because we should be become more Christ-like*.* Let us not forget to ask God to help us in our pursuit of godly wisdom… *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* (James 1:5) However, we will never develop anything close to the wisdom of God. That is why it is important for us to remember to… “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. Acknowledge him, and all your ways, and he shall direct your paths.*” (Prov. 3:4-5)
3. **Wrath:** Although it is certainly true that God is love and mercy and grace, God also directs his wrath against sin. God hates sin. Many people have a tendency to picture God as being different in the Old Testament, compared to the New Testament. They seem to reference the God of the Old Testament as a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament as a God of love and forgiveness. As we have seen, there is only one God, and that God is unchanging. It has intrigued me that so many people ignore many of the words of Jesus noted in the Gospels. For example, Jesus said, “*he who believes in the son has eternal life; he who does not obey the son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him.”* (John 3:36) There are many other verses where Jesus speaks of future punishment for those who do not know him as Savior. The great apostle Paul said, “*for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of man*.” (Rom. 1:18) These are just two examples of the many verses in the New Testament that speak of the wrath of God and the coming eternal damnation in hell for those who do not accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. There is no difference in the God of the Old and New Testaments – they are one and the same God. The great news for Christians is that Jesus has “delivered us from the wrath to come.” (1 Thess. 1:10) He bore the wrath of God that was due us in order that we might be saved. Because of God’s mercy, he does exhibit great patience towards the sinner. However, eventually there will come a time in every person’s life where a decision must be made – will they accept Jesus as Savior and Lord or will they reject (or ignore) him. Eventually we will all face Jesus after we pass from this life into the next. Hopefully, the reader of these words will not face Jesus at the Great White Throne Judgment. Only those destined for hell will see him there. “*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* ***10****But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”* (2 Peter 3:9-10)
4. **Inscrutable:** I only found this attribute listed by one theologian, Dr. Harold Wilmington of Liberty University. However, I think it is a good one to mention. This word is defined as ‘very difficult or impossible to interpret or understand. “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’*” (Romans 11:33-34) There are some things that God does (or allows) that we as humans have an extremely difficult time understanding. God reminds us of this fact in Isaiah, “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.* ***9****For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Maybe the best example of this in the Bible is found in the book of Job… and we see Job dealing with this issue throughout the entire book. Job asks “why?” on thirteen different occasions during his terrible ideal. He simply cannot understand why God is allowing him to suffer so much. It gets to the point where he is much more bothered by his ignorance concerning the reasons behind God allowing him to suffer than he is about the suffering itself. If only God would tell him the answers to his questions, he might well be able to deal with the physical pain. He just wants to understand God and his motivations. He pleads over and over again with God. “*Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God*.” (Job 13:3) “*Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!* ***4****I would present my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments.* ***5****I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me….* **7** *There the upright could reason with him; and I would be delivered forever from my Judge.* **8** *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him:* ***9****On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him”* (Job 23:3-5,7-9) “*Oh that one* (God) *would hear me! behold, my desire is, that the Almighty would answer me.”*(Job 31:35) Finally, God speaks to Job and reminds him just who Job is questioning… the Almighty God, himself. “*Then Job answered the LORD, and said,* ***2****I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.* ***3****Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.”* (Job 42:1-3) Interestingly, God still did not explain to Job why he was being plagued with so much suffering… instead, God reminds Job in much detail and with much fanfare just who he (i.e. God) is. When Job takes a long moment to reflect and recognize that he is questioning the omniscient, all-wise, all-loving God of the universe… the God who loves Job and every other person who has ever lived or ever will live infinitely much, and also has omnipotent power to see to it that *eventually* everything will work out fine for his children… then Job relaxes and once again trusts in God to do what is best for him. That is what all Christians need to do in times of trouble and doubt… that is, we need to simply place our faith and trust in God… He can take care of any problem and he will do so… in his timing, however.

**Conclusion**: There are a handful of other attributes of God that are mentioned by some theologians. However, all of them can be derived from those mentioned above quite easily. In other words, if a person understands those attributes just discussed, along with recognizing the truths that are revealed by an understanding of God’s biblical names, he/she will have a fine understanding of who God really is and how much he loves us and is worthy of our trust and love.

**The Doctrines of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost**

**Introduction:** The study of the attributes of God is one of the more important doctrinal studies that will be undertaken in this treatise. Essentially, all of the other doctrines of the Bible are based in some manner on one or more aspects of the doctrine of God. We have just completed reviewing the many attributes of the one and only God – each of the character traits reviewed is found in every person of the Trinity – and all of them are found in the total essence of God.

In the next few sections, each of the three persons of the Trinity will be looked at individually to see how each person’s role is unique. The first person of the Trinity, God the Father, will be examined next.

1. **The Doctrine of the Father**

As will be shown, the Father has a wonderful array of unique attributes that should fill the reader with wonder, awe, respect, and tremendous love for what he has done for those who choose to love and follow him.

I believe that the major *unique* role that God the Father played was simply that he was a Father to Jesus… especially when Jesus had emptied himself of much of his godly powers while down here on earth. God also is the Father to all of his earthly children. In other words, it is not just a coincidence that this first person of the Trinity is referred to as God the Father. Let us take a closer look at some of the biblical evidence. However, before getting into the relationships of God to his Son and to his Creation, let me also point out that the Father certainly had an important role in that creation. Remember, “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* ***2****And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”* (Gen 1:1-2) In these first two verses of Genesis, Moses tells us that God (presumably the Father) created the universe, with input from the Holy Spirit of God throughout the process. Many other places in the Bible tell us that the Father used the Son as the primary agent for the creation of the universe. No better example is found, than the following, “*In the beginning was the Word* (Jesus)*, and the Word was with God* (the Father), *and the Word was God.* ***2****The same was in the beginning with God.* ***3****All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”* (John 1:1-3)

If we look at God the Father as the Father of everything and everyone (Jesus, Holy Spirit, and humanity), I think we can best see his unique role in the Trinity. For instance, the Father orders and regulates all things according to his eternal plan. “*But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him.”* (1 Cor. 8:6) *The LORD* (the Father) *is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.* ***9****The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.* (Psalms 145:8-9) God the Father rules the universe sovereignly, “*The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”* (Psalms 103:19) “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* ***34****For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?* ***36****For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever.”* (Romans 11:33-34,36)

However, his role as Father stands out more than any other to differentiate from the other two members of the Trinity. As Creator and the person who orders and regulates all things, he is a Father to all mankind. “*One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* (Eph. 4:6) He is the spiritual Father to all Christians… “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.* ***15****For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* ***16****The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”(*Romans 8:14-16*)* In these verses, Paul even shows Christians that we can rightly look at God, our Father, as our Daddy (*Abba=Daddy*). (Romans 8:14-16) When writing to the church at Corinth, Paul told them that if they would only turn to Jesus and truly accept the gospel that their Father in heaven would respond in the following manner: “*I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*.”(2 Cor 6:17-18) Certainly, God the Father makes that same offer to all people.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:* ***4****According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:* ***5****Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”* (Eph. 1:3-5) “*What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”* (1 John 3:1) God, the Father, predestined and elected the believer and he gave them to his son, Jesus Christ. “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.****38****For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.****39****And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”*(John 6:37-39) God had big plans for those people that he predestined and called to be saved… “*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* ***30****Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”* (Romans 8:29-30)

When Jesus returned to heaven after his resurrection, he asked that his Father send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide those who chose to follow Jesus. “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever.” (John 14:16) God watches over his children: he comforts them, he chastens them, and, one day, he will glorify them. “*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the* ***God of all comfort****;* ***4****Who comforteth us in all our tribulation.”* (2 Cor 1:3-4) “*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:* ***6****For whom the Lord loveth he* ***chasteneth****, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* ***7****If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”* (Heb 12:5-7) “*Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also* ***glorified****.”* (Romans 8:30)

So, the Father treats us as his children. Of course, we are his children. He has a very special relationship with the elect… those that will become believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. He has an even more intimate relationship with his son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Sometime before the creation of the universe, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit made the decision to send Jesus Christ to earth at a time in the future in order to be the Savior of mankind. The Bible makes it clear, that the Father sent the Son and instructed him on what to do and say (at least, at times). “*But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son, made of a woman.”*(Gal. 4:4) *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) “For I have not spoken of myself; but the father, which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak.”* (John 12:49)

God, the Father, honors and glorifies the Son. “*Jesus answered, if I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my father that honoreth of me; of whom ye say, that he is your God*.” (John 8:54) *Father, the hour is come; glorify thy son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: and now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”* (John 17:1,5)

The Father taught Jesus what he needed to know while on this earth. Remember, Jesus was still fully God while incarnate, but, he had relinquished much of his power… at least, on a day to day basis. He was still fully human as well and needed to do those things that all humans do… including study the scriptures, eat, walk, work, sleep, etc. The Father (and the Holy Spirit) helped him a lot. Remember, it would be difficult (if not impossible) to find a biblical figure who prayed more to God the Father than God the Son! “*Then said Jesus unto them, ‘when ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my father hath* ***taught*** *me, I speak these things’.*” (John 8:28)

God (the Father) was always very proud of and pleased with his Son. He spoke from heaven on more than one occasion to make this point clear. For example, when John the Baptist was baptizing him and when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, God said, “*this is my beloved son, in whom I am well* ***pleased***.” (Matt. 3:17, 17:5)

God, the Father, also anointed and sent his Son to accomplish several tasks while on earth: “*he* ***anointed*** *me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*” (Luke 4:18-19)

Finally, God offered up his Son on the cross*. “Then said Jesus unto Peter, ‘put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?’” (John 18:11) “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.”* (Rom 8:32)

After the sacrificial death of Jesus, his Father resurrected him from the grave on Easter morning. Approximately six weeks later, God sent angels to escort his Son back into heaven, where he is now seated at the right hand of his Father. God, the Father, has also decided to commit all future judgment into the capable hands of Jesus. Note the following verses:

*“He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.”* (Eph. 1:20)

*“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.”* (Phil. 2:9)

*“And had put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”* (Eph. 1:22)

*“The father loved the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.”* (John3:35)

*“For the father judges no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also because he is the Son of Man.”* (John 5:22,27)

God the Father had a similar relationship with God the Holy Spirit in the sense that the Father was involved in handing out certain tasks for the Holy Spirit. More will be said about this in the discussion, soon to follow, concerning God the Holy Spirit.

**Conclusion**: Although it is true that the Father–Son relationship that took place while Jesus was in his incarnate form on earth had to be intriguingly different than it had been prior to that time, it is still true that they have always had this Father-Son relationship for all eternity. Jesus has always been the only begotten of the Father. Of course, we cannot forget the Holy Spirit as well. It is obvious that we can never completely understand the mysterious relationship of the Trinity. However, the Trinity does exist, and there is quite a great deal of evidence of it in the Bible... as has already been shown. The following two sections will present information describing the characteristics of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

1. **The Doctrine of the Son**

Prior to the creation of the world, the three persons of the Holy Trinity made a variety of very important decisions. Three of the more important were the following:

* The decision to create the universe and all that was within it was made.
* The decision to give men and women free will, and therefore the ability to love, was made. This also allowed for the possibility of rejecting God’s law (i.e. the possibility of sin).
* The decision was made for God the Father, one day in the distant future, to send his Son, Jesus, to earth to be born of a virgin and then to live a perfect life as a human being. The plan was for Jesus to offer up his life as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He would shed his blood on a cross. This incredibly loving act would allow for the salvation of those people who would believe on him and place their trust in him.

As was mentioned earlier, Jesus Christ is God. The essence of Jesus is exactly equivalent to the essence of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” (John 1:1) Jesus does have a different role to play, especially while on earth, than the other two persons of the Trinity. However, he still retains all of the attributes of God that were listed earlier in this treatise.

The fact is that only God is capable of saving mankind from an eternal banishment to hell. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, all subsequent men and women born of the seed of Adam were cursed by “original sin” (more on this later). There was no way that any person was going to be able to live a sinless life from that time forward. God, being a perfectly just God, requires a sinful person to pay the penalty for their sins… and the penalty for sin is death. Yet, God loves his creation – he loves mankind.

The decision was made by the Trinity to have the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, come into the world through a virgin birth (see the *Doctrine of the Virgin Birth* and the *Doctrine of the Incarnation* below) at the appropriate point in time. Jesus would come into this world as a little baby while still retaining his status as God. While on this earth after his incarnation, Jesus was truly 100% God and 100% human. The Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit were with Jesus and helping Jesus during his time on earth. “*For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.*” (John 6:38) This virgin birth of God into the world as a human is known as the incarnation (more about this can be found in the next section). “*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*.” (Phil 2:6-8) God the Son was judged capable of atoning for the sins of mankind if he would willingly sacrifice his life (through the shedding of his blood on the cross) after living a perfect, sinless life on this earth. “*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, ‘behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’*” (John 1:29) Wonderfully, Jesus Christ did accomplish this amazing task.

The most important role that Jesus fulfilled during his time on earth has to be his role as Savior to mankind. However, Jesus also accomplished many other things prior to his time on earth and while he was here on this earth. Genesis 1:1 tells us that “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*.” It would appear that God the Father directed the creation of the universe and that Jesus carried out the actual creation since there are very many verses to that effect. For instance: “***All things were made by him***(Jesus) *and without him was not anything made that was made.*” (John 1:3) “God… *hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things,* ***by whom also he made the worlds****….. and, thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands*.” (Hebrews 1:2,10) “***For by him* (Jesus) *were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth****… All things were created by him and for him*.” (Col. 1:16)

Of course, Jesus Christ, the baby, makes his first appearance in the first chapters of the gospels in the New Testament. The remainder of the entire New Testament, in one way or another, concerns the Lord Jesus Christ. However, Jesus Christ, God the Son, is seen all throughout the Old Testament as well. There are a number of theophanies mentioned in the Old Testament. A theophany is an appearance by Christ prior to his incarnation in Bethlehem. Often when the phrase ‘Angel of the Lord’ is used in the Old Testament it should be identified with Christ himself – but not always, however. The context in which it is used generally makes it obvious whether it is Christ or an actual angel. The following are a few of the many theophanies in the Old Testament:

* *“And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?* ***14****And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?* ***15****And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” (*Josh 5:13-15)
* *“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.* (Judges 6:12) (Jesus appearing to Gideon)
* *“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.* ***24****Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, ‘Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?’ They answered and said unto the king, ‘True, O king.’* ***25****He answered and said, ‘Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.’”* (Dan 3:23-25)
* Christ certainly appeared to Daniel in a vision*… “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.* ***10****…* ***13****I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.”* (Dan 7:9-14)

**Jesus was a perfect human while on earth:**

Jesus was born via a virgin birth through Mary (see the *Doctrine of the Virgin Birth* that follows). He was in the line of David as prophesied in the Old Testament. “*And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name Jesus*.” (Luke 1:31) “*But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law*.” (Gal. 4:4) Just as other humans, Jesus had a body, soul, and spirit. “*For in that she had poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.*” (Matt. 26:12) “*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death*.” (Matt. 26:38) “*and when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, ‘Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:’ and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”* (Luke 23:46) Jesus looked like a man because he was a man. He was flesh and blood. “*For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*.” (Heb 2:14) Frankly, Jesus had to be a man in order to qualify to be the propitiation for the sins of mankind. God would and could only accept a “like” substitute to pay the penalty for a man’s or woman’s sins (human for human). Hence, the Old Testament’s sacrificial system (using animals) could never adequately absolve the guilt from a person. That system was a harbinger of the true sacrificial Lamb to come.

Jesus had many other characteristics of a man, growing and learning as he went through his life on earth. “*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature*.” (Luke 2:52) Although there are many times that Jesus used his omnipotent and omniscient powers, there were other times, when he demonstrated the limited knowledge and needs of humans. For example:

“*Where have you laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see.*” (John 11:34)

*"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* (Mark 13:32)

“*and in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*” (Mark 1:35) He used prayer to communicate with his Father.

“*for we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*.” (Heb. 4:15)

“*and when he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry*.” (Matt. 4:2)

“*There, cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, give me to drink*.” (John 4:7) Jesus got hungry and thirsty.

Jesus cried… “*And when he was come near, he beheld the city (Jerusalem) and wept over it*.” (Luke 19:41)

Jesus also demonstrated many, many other human characteristics. When he was weary and tired, he slept. He loved people, and he showed compassion frequently. At times he was righteously angered, and at times he grieved. “*And when he had looked around about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, stretch forth thine hand. He stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other*.” (Mark 3:5) Jesus experienced joy, yet was troubled on occasion. *“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.”* (John 12:27) On the night before his crucifixion, he sweat drops as if it were blood. “*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground*.” (Luke 22:44) He suffered, bled, and died. Jesus experienced what other humans experience during their lives on this earth, even to include temptation. He did not, however, ever sin.

Because Jesus was quite literally a perfect human being, without sin, his human attributes were outstanding. Jesus was a great friend to those who knew him well. He was always showing compassion and helping the sick and the hungry. “*And when Jesus went forth he saw a great multitude; He was moved with compassion toward them, and healed their sick*.” (Matt. 14:14) Although he was the Messiah, and Lord of all, he demonstrated meekness and gentleness and humility to his disciples. “*He rises from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that, he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples feet.*” (Jon 13:4-5) He was certainly fearless in all that he did, even to submitting to a torturous death on the cross. He was always obedient to his Father. “*And it came to pass, when the time was come, that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem*.” (Luke 9:51) Jesus had an incredibly loving and close relationship with his Father, God. He was seemingly always communing with God in prayer. He loved and taught his disciples throughout all their years together. He had a special loving relationship with children as well. “*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*” (Mark 10:14)

**Jesus was God while on earth:**

While Jesus was 100% human while on earth, he also was 100% God. This concept will be explained more during the discussion of the virgin birth and the incarnation that follows this doctrinal topic. As mentioned earlier, Jesus appears in the Old Testament frequently being referred to as the angel of the Lord. There are several other places in the Old Testament that are more specific in their pronouncement that Jesus is God. “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the Prince of peace*.” (Isaiah 9:6) In the seventh chapter of Daniel noted earlier in this chapter, Daniel had a vision of the Son of Man (Jesus) in which he described Jesus as God.

Jesus did demonstrate many of his godly attributes during his life on earth. For example, he performed multiple miracles over sickness, demons, nature, and death:

“*Then he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.”* (Luke 4:39)

*“Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘hold thy peace, and come out of him.’ And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not*.” (Luke 4:35)

*“He said, ‘young man, I say unto thee, arise.’” And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”* (Luke 7:14-15)

Jesus even forgave sins as only God can do. “And when *Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic: ‘son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.’*” (Matt. 9:2)

Jesus demonstrated his supernatural knowledge many times during his lifetime, as described in the Gospels. Just to list a few examples, he knew about the plot of Judas, he knew the life history of the Samaritan woman, and he knew where Nathaniel had been prior to meeting up with Jesus when Jesus chose him to be one of his disciples.

A large variety of people eventually recognized Jesus not only as the Messiah, but as God the Son. Of course, at his birth he was recognized as God by angels, by shepherds, and by wise men. During his adult life, many recognized his supernatural capabilities and that caused them to recognize him as God.

“*And behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”* (Matt. 8:2)

“*There came a certain ruler, and worshiped him, saying, my daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live*.” (Matt. 9:18)

“*Thomas answered and said unto him, my Lord and my God*.” (John 20:28)

After seeing their friend, Jesus, walking on the water, the disciples surely knew that they were in the company of God… “*then they that were in the ship came and worshiped him, saying, of a truth thou art the son of God*.” (Matt.14:33) There are a multitude of other examples in the gospels of people recognizing Jesus as God.

Of course, the most important aspect of the life of Jesus on this earth was that he would eventually give his life as a sacrifice for mankind, “*for the Son of Man came to save that which was lost.*” (Matt. 18:11)

In order for Christ’s sacrificial death to be effective in saving mankind, Jesus had to live a sinless life. He did. This is testified to in the Bible in many places. For example: Jesus says, *“I am the light of the world.*” (John 8:12) Jesus here is claiming to be the source of purity and righteousness in the world. Jesus also noted that,

“*I always do what is pleasing to Him (God)”* (John 8:29)

“*for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” (2 Cor. 5:21)

“*for we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was an all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*.” (Heb 4:15)

“*and ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*” (1 John 3:5)

It is important to understand that most theologians believe that although Jesus Christ was able to be tempted because he was fully human, he was not actually able to sin because he was also fully God. God cannot sin – he is perfect. Jesus did not give up any of his godlike attributes when he became God incarnate… instead, he just *added* perfect humanity to his perfection as God in one indivisible person. Since Jesus Christ was, and is, a holy and indivisible person, he could not, nor cannot, sin. Some may ask, “Why was Jesus tempted in the wilderness if there was no chance of him actually sinning?” These trials were primarily to demonstrate that Christ would not sin… and, in fact, he did not. He also demonstrated appropriate ways to combat temptation.

**The kenosis of Jesus Christ:**

**“***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form,* ***8****he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* (Phil 2:5-8) The verses above led several German and English theologians in the latter part of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century to adopt the theory now known at the “kenosis theory.” This idea states that “Christ ‘emptied himself’ of some of his divine attributes, such as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, while he was on earth as a man.” (Grudem, Wayne, Systematic Theology, p. 550) Grudem and Norman Geisler both believe that this kenosis theory is simply not correct. Those verses never say that Jesus gave up any godly characteristics. He simply became a man… and a servant as well. Of course, that is true. Jesus did give up the elevated *status* that he had in heaven and humbled himself so that he could accomplish his goals while on earth. It is worth noting that this kenosis theory came around at a time in history when many people of all stations were questioning God, Christianity, miracles, creation, etc. However, as students of the Bible recognize, there is an abundance of evidence that the Bible is the actual Word of God – 100% true and accurate. Jesus, even while on earth, was at all times 100% God:

“*For it pleased the Father that in Him* ***all the fullness should dwell****,* ***20****and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”* (Col 1:19-20)

“*For in Him* ***dwells all the fullness of the Godhead*** *bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”*(Col 2:9-10)

*"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "****God with us****."* (Matt 1:23)

Jesus had to be God. Any finite person would not have been able to avoid sin after Adam’s fall. The Old Testament is filled with references (through stories found in Old Testament “types” and various scattered verses) that salvation will come through the Lord God. For example, “*Salvation is of the Lord*.” (Jonah 2:9) Only God himself could serve as an adequate mediator between man and God… and we certainly need one.

I believe that a proper way of looking at Christ’s limitations while on earth do not involve him giving up any of his godly attributes. However, it is pretty apparent that *Jesus did not avail himself to all of those attributes at all times*. John McArthur puts it this way, “He set aside the voluntary display of his divine attributes and submitted himself to the Spirit’s direction.” For example, Jesus said that even he did not know the day or hour of his return… “But of that day and hour knoweth no *man*, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”(Matt 24:36) I believe that he could have known if he so chose… but, he wanted to live the life of a human being, and it was important that he did so. On occasion, he did take good advantage of his second nature, but, in all cases, he did so at very opportune times. Typically, he did so either to teach an important lesson, heal the sick, or demonstrate the veracity of his message, including the fact that he was, in fact, God the Son.

**The offices of Jesus Christ:**

Jesus fulfilled all three of the important offices that God created in Old Testament times to meet the needs of the Jewish people: priest, prophet, and king. God only allowed for one individual, Jesus, to take on the duties of all three offices. When Saul tried to step in and handle certain priestly duties, God punished him severely, and he eventually lost his position as king to David.

* **Priest** – a priest had to be chosen by God, consecrated by God, and usually came from the tribe of Levi. Jesus was called by God to be a priest in a particularly special priestly order, the order of Melchizedek. “*And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.* ***5****So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";* ***6****as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."* (Heb 5:4-6) “*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens.”* (Heb 7:26) Jesus certainly carried out his priestly duties, “*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.****16****They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.****17****Sanctify them by Your truth*.” (John 17:15-17) Wonderfully, Jesus, as priest, offered himself as the one and only adequate and necessary sacrifice to God… “My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.**18** No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” (John 10:17-18) Jesus continues to intercede for his chosen people while in heaven, *“It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*” (Romans 8:34) Even now, Jesus intercedes for Christians as our mediator – when God looks at a Christian, he sees the righteousness of Christ. “*There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ.*” (1 Tim. 2:5) “*now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,* ***22****even* ***the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus******Christ, to all and on all who believe****.”* (Romans 3:21-22)
* **Prophet** – Jesus was definitely a prophet while on earth. A prophet represents God before people, and often foretells future events. He would let people know what God expects of them. Moses prophesied that there would come a great prophet one day like himself, “*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”* (Deut 18:15) Speaking of Jesus, the people said “they glorified God, saying, ‘*A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’"* (Luke 7:16) They said of Jesus while on the road to Emmaus, *“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.”* (Luke 24:19)
* **King** – God would choose a person to be king. The last and great, eternal king would come from the tribe of Judah and the seed of David. Jesus was chosen by God to be that king. “*The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."* (Rev 5:5) "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” (Matt 28:18-19) In the future, eternal heaven and earth, Jesus will rule as king… “*He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.* ***16****And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”* (Rev 19:15-16)

**The death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ:**

So far we have looked at the life of Christ after his incarnation. It is very obvious that Jesus, God the Son, has many unique aspects in his person that distinguish him from the Father and the Holy Spirit. I believe that the main purpose of his coming to earth was to die. Of course, this was not to be an ordinary death, but a sacrificial death on a cross that would serve to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. Jesus allowed himself to be subjugated to this tortuous sacrificial death. Unfortunately, this required our Savior to suffer great humiliation and pain. On Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead! He had conquered Satan and death, itself. After appearing multiple times during the next six weeks, he ascended back into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father. He is now in heaven, interceding for the elect and preparing a place for those who love him. He will come again one day in the future to set up his kingdom where he will reign as king of kings for all eternity. Much more will be covered on the topics of the atonement, salvation, the resurrection of the dead, the Rapture, the Second Coming, the Millennium, and heaven later on in this book. Although Jesus already has accomplished so very much, given all that he has done relating to the creation of the world and his incredible life while on earth, he still has an amazing array of things to do in the future. Much of this future work will be covered in later chapters.

**Summary - The Son of God:**

Jesus has a unique role to play as the second person of the Trinity. He came to earth as incarnate God to serve as our priest, prophet, and our king. He is our Mediator, the Sacrificial Lamb, our Teacher, the model for living our lives, the future King during the Millennial Kingdom, and the future Judge of all mankind.

It is interesting to note, as mentioned above, that Jesus has been given the task of judgment in the end times… “*For the father judges no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the son*.” (John 5:22) Much more will be discussed on the topic of the Final Judgment later in this book.

1. **The Doctrine of the Incarnation:**

One of the major doctrines of the Bible is that of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity… God the Son… Jesus. The definition of this word and concept was finally accepted at a council in the city of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. Prior to this time, there was a lot of confusion concerning the true character and person of Jesus Christ. After much study and discussion, the following Chalcedonian Definition was accepted:

*We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood;* ***truly God and truly man****, other reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the father. According to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things, like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation,* ***born of the Virgin Mary,*** *the Mother of God, according to the Manhood;* ***one in the same Christ, Son, Lord****,* ***Only-Begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son,*** *and only begotten, God, the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy fathers has been handed down to us.*

Prior to this counsel, there had been more than one markedly incorrect view concerning the deity and humanity of Christ. As mentioned earlier, the belief system known as Arianism held that Jesus was not fully God. Apollinarianism was a view that taught that Christ had a human body, but a mind and spirit that was the divine. Nestorianism was a view that somehow believed that Jesus was both a human person and a separate divine person - suggesting that these two persons might possibly be differing at any given time as to what to do or think. Monophysitism suggests that Christ has one nature only, a mixture of a human nature and a divine nature. Of course, all four of these views are incorrect.

To summarize the definition of the incarnation, it states that Jesus definitely has two distinct natures, a divine nature and the human nature – in each of these natures, he is 100% human and 100% God. His divine nature or essence is exactly the same as that of the Father and the Holy Spirit. His human nature is the same as our human nature - except that he is without sin. His human nature has all of the attributes of other humans. We have already discussed his divine attributes earlier – and Jesus, in his incarnation, retained all of these. Somehow, these two natures are united together in the one human being, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. This union of Christ’s two natures into one person is called the ***hypostatic*** union.

1. **The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth:**

A recent survey found that 9% of those saying that they are Christians believe that Jesus was not born of a virgin. If I had not become aware many years ago that many of these same individuals do not believe in the possibility of miracles, I would have been really surprised at that number. I wonder how these same people think they could possibly end up in heaven one day… won’t that be a miracle?

Actually, the virgin birth of our Savior is an important aspect of God’s plan for the salvation of his elect. We will take a close look at this doctrine now. The doctrine states that Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. He had no human father. In fact, Mary was a virgin at the time of conception. Matthew clearly points this out, “*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.”* (Matt 1:18) Paul explains its purpose in his epistle to the Galatians, “*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,* ***5****to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”* (Gal 4:4-5) The virgin birth accomplished several things:

* It was a fulfillment of prophecy. Old Testament prophecies reveal that God would enter into the world by way of a virgin birth, have no earthly father (therefore not be from the line of Joseph), and be born in Bethlehem… “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."* (Gen 3:15) “*the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel* (God with us)*.”* (Isaiah 7:14) “*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."* (Micah 5:2) There are other prophesies in the Old Testament concerning the coming Lord God. Interestingly, a famous Jewish scholar, Jacob Neusner, wrote a book titled, *Incarnation of God*. Although not a Christian, he sees the evidence in the Old Testament that suggests strongly that God would one day enter this world via incarnation. That is particularly impressive, coming from a Jew.
* Joseph could not be the father of the Messiah since he was a descendant of the line of Jeconiah. God told Jeremiah not long before the fall of Judah to Babylon that the Messiah would not be an heir of King Jeconiah. *“Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man* [Jeconiah] *childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.”* (Jer 22:30) The geneology in the first chapter of Matthew shows Joseph to be a descendant of Jeconiah – hence, he could not be the father of Jesus… genetically.
* However, Mary descended from David’s son Nathan. There would be no problem for her to be in the line that would lead to the Messiah… and, of course, she was... “*the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*” (Luke 1:35)
* It was important that Jesus be truly God. Only God would be able to save mankind. However, Jesus had to be human as well… and lead a perfect, sinless life in order to be an adequate sacrifice to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. He had to be an example to humans of how to live life and pursue sanctification. All of these things required the virgin birth and the incarnation.
* There are a great many explanations as to the value of the virgin birth to enable Jesus to be born without the stain of original stain. It is obvious that there would be a problem if Jesus had been born in the normal [Joseph+Mary] fashion. “*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* (Romans 5:12) With the Holy Spirit intimately involved in the incarnation of Christ (and Joseph out of the picture), it was not a difficult matter for God to come into this world in an appropriate manner. After the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, Jesus was miraculously conceived, and was born nine months later, without the stain of original sin.

1. **Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**

The third person of the Holy Trinity is the Holy Spirit. As will soon become evident, since the creation of the world, the Spirit has had an amazing array of responsibilities. Fortunately, he is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient because all three of these characteristics are needed to carry these duties out. That reminds us of the fact that the Holy Spirit is an equal partner in the Godhead. He is just like the Father and the Son in that the Holy Spirit is fully God. Of course, he has a different role to play which will be discussed now.

It may be worthwhile to remind the reader that although each person of the Trinity is of the same *essence*, each person does have a unique role. The Father is the organizer and, frankly, the father of the group. It was ultimately his decision to send the Son to earth to be the sacrificial Lamb for mankind. The Son, Jesus, carried out his Father’s decision… with the help of the Holy Spirit. Norman Geisler puts it, rather nicely in the following manner: “the Father is the Source, the Son is the Means, and the Holy Spirit is the Effector of salvation – it is the He who convicts, convinces, and converts.” As will be shown in what follows, the Holy Spirit has a multitude of responsibilities on earth. As we shall see, he appeared frequently in Old Testament times to do the work required of him. He has had an even larger role since the Church came into existence at Pentecost.

First of all, it is important that the reader recognizes that the Holy Spirit is a full and complete member of the Holy Trinity – in other words, he is God. The Holy Spirit has all of the attributes discussed earlier concerning God. Of course, he is omnipresent… “*Whether shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*” (Psalm 139:7) The Holy Spirit had an important role in creation, “*and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*” (Gen 1:2) The writer of Hebrews recognizes him as an eternal being, “*how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit, offered himself without spot to God*” (Heb. 9:14a) When Peter reprimanded Ananias for lying to the Holy Ghost, he told him, “*thou hast not lied unto man, but unto God*.” (Acts 5:4) Literally hundreds of additional scriptural examples could be given to show that the Holy Spirit is God. I believe it is more important to point out some of the specific ministries of the Holy Spirit in this section.

**Ministries of the Holy Spirit:**

1. **Creation:** All three persons of the Trinity were involved in the creation of the universe and all that is within the universe. I pointed out how the Holy Spirit is mentioned as moving “upon the face of the waters” in the second verse in the Bible. Job noted that “*by his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent*.” (Job 26:13)
2. **Scriptures:** An incredibly important responsibility of the Holy Spirit involves the transmission of God’s thoughts and words into the Scriptures. The spirit of God is, in fact, the author of the Bible. In a sense, he “dictated” the Bible to 40 men over a time period of greater than 1000 years. I put the word “dictated” in quotes because the Holy Spirit did not literally dictate the Bible to these men, but he certainly made sure that everything that they wrote down was true and complete, and exactly what he wanted them to write. They were able to write it in their own words and style – but it had to be exactly correct. Another very important aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry concerning the Bible relates to the fact that he will help those who fervently study the Bible to understand it properly. Let’s take a look at just a few of the verses in the Bible that relate to this issue: “*The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.”* (2 Sam. 23:2) Jeremiah put it this way, *“Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.* (Jer. 1:9) Peter said, “*for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*.” (2 Peter 1:21) Paul added in his letter to Timothy*,” all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*: (2 Tim 3:15-17) Jesus, himself, said, *“these things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”* (John 14:25,26) The apostle John noted when writing *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* that Jesus told him, “*I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, what thou seest, write in a book, and send it on to the seven churches which are in Asia.”* (Rev. 1:10) All of the above verses point to the fact that the Holy Spirit would make sure that the writers of the Bible got their message down correctly… that is, the Bible would be the inspired, inerrant, Word of God.

Paul reminds the reader of scripture that, “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (1 Cor 2:14) This verse should not be interpreted as saying that the Bible should not be read for understanding by non-Christians… of course it should. If read with an open mind, God the Holy Spirit can reveal critically important truths to the reader and, hopefully, many will come to a saving relationship with Christ. However, when a Christian reads the Bible, the Holy Spirit can work to enlighten him/her in a mysterious way and give a greater understanding of the scriptures than would be possible otherwise. Paul continued on when writing to the Corinthian church about the need to be in Christ for proper understanding of the Bible, “*But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.* ***16****Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.* ***17****Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”* (2 Cor 3:15-17) These verses should not be taken as an excuse not to thoroughly study the Bible using good commentaries, dictionaries, etc. Instead, we should just remember that the Holy Spirit living within the Christian will help guide each Christian into a more proper understanding of the Word of God… and that the Bible is, in fact, the actual Word of God.

1. **God’s People**:

**Old Testament Days** - The Holy Spirit has a primary responsibility of leading believers to do God’s will. There are dozens of examples of this in the Old and New Testaments. Interestingly, in Old Testament days, the Holy Spirit would sometimes come upon a person to lead them in a direction pleasing to the Trinity and at times, leave that same individual to his own devices. Samson is an excellent example of this intermittent filling with the Holy Spirit… “*And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid*.” (Judges 14:6) Also, sometime later, the Spirit came upon Samson again…“*But once again, when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him: “and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burned with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hand. He found a new jawbone of an ass and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew 1000 men therewith*.” (Judges 15:14-15) However, after Delilah cut his hair, the Spirit left Samson once again. At the end of his life, his faith renewed, Samson prayed once more for the Spirit’s power to come upon him, “*And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.”* (Judges 16:28) God granted him that request.

Saul is another Old Testament person who experienced the anointing of the Holy Spirit as well as the removal of this anointing. When he was anointed king by Samuel, the Bible says “*the spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them*.” (1 Samuel 10:10) However, when Saul disobeyed God by offering a sacrifice that should only have been offered by a priest, God’s Holy Spirit left him. The list of those having God’s spirit come upon them in the Old Testament is long. Some of those included are: Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, King David, Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zachariah. However, when the Holy Spirit did come into these people to lead them, there was no guarantee that the Spirit would remain with these individuals for the rest of their lives.

**Church Age** - The Holy Spirit has a wonderful responsibility in the life of a Christian. Amazingly, a Christian is a new creation in Christ. We shall learn more about this later, but it is the Holy Spirit’s responsibility to **re-create this new person in Christ**. When Nicodemus asked Jesus, how to be born again… in other words, how to become a Christian, Jesus replied, “*verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto the he must be born again.”* (John 3:3-7) The Holy Spirit also **baptizes the new believer**. Every Christian has been baptized by the Holy Spirit. “*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* (Gal 3:27) “*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”*(Romans 8:9) Very importantly, the Holy Spirit **indwells the believer.** That makes the believer the temple of God in these New Testament days. “*Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19) “*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us in God.*” (1 Corinthians 2:12) Once a person finds Jesus Christ, and accepts him as his/her Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live within that person… to be a comfort, guide, and help throughout the remainder of that person’s life on this earth. The Spirit also serves as a “**seal**” **upon the person** and as a promise of that individual’s future inheritance as an heir of Christ in heaven. The Holy Spirit “*also sealed us, and given us the spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”* (2 Cor. 1:22) Paul also said the Spirit was “*the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory*.” (Ephesians 1:14)

The Holy Spirit also **fills the believer** and enables him to lead a more powerfully effective life for Christ. When a Christian is filled with the Holy Ghost, he/she is able to pursue sanctification much more easily and with more strength of purpose. There are many different opinions concerning the filling with the Holy Spirit throughout Christendom. I will delve into some of these differing opinions a little later in this book. However, it is undeniable that if Christians allow themselves to be controlled by the Holy Spirit of God, their life will be markedly better and much more pleasing to God. Let me point out just a few of the verses that relate to the filling with the Holy Spirit: “*this I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”* (Gal. 5:16) Stephen, the first Christian martyr was certainly filled with the Spirit… “*But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God*.” (Acts. 7:55) Speaking of Barnabas, the Bible states, “*for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and a great many people were added unto the Lord*.” (Acts. 11:24) These and other verses attest to the fact that when a person allows the Holy Spirit to fill their mind and bodies and run their lives, they will be much better people and accomplish much more for God.

However, as opposed to the first four effects that the Holy Spirit has on the believer (each noted in bold letters above), this filling of the believer can be lost. That is, all Christians are *re-created* as new believers in Christ, *baptized* by the Holy Spirit, *in-dwelt* by the Holy Spirit, and *sealed* by the Holy Spirit - all accomplished at the same time and done permanently. On the other hand, after accepting Christ as Savior, the filling by the Holy Spirit can be quenched when a believer is disobedient. In fact, Paul warns Christians not to quench the Spirit when he wrote his letter to the Thessalonians “*quench not the spirit*.” (1 Thessalonians 5:19) In writing to the Ephesians he stated, “*and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption*.” (Ephesians 4:30) It is certainly possible to regain the filling by the spirit. “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.*” (1 John 1:9) In other words, when we sin, we need to recognize our actions as being sinful, and sincerely ask God for his forgiveness. We also need to turn away from that sin and do everything in our power to keep from committing more in the future. We will not be perfect, but we should try our best at all times. When the believer is successful in allowing the Holy Spirit to control his thoughts and actions (i.e. his life), the Holy Spirit will be able help that person accomplish many things for the cause of Christ. The spirit will guide the believer, teach him, help him to witness to others, give him assurance of salvation, and… simply put… help conform each Christian to the image of Christ. Simply put, the Holy Spirit will lead the Christian toward his ultimate goal of sanctification.

1. **Ministry for Sinners:** One additional very important job of the Holy Spirit is to convict sinners of their need of salvation. Many people simply do not recognize their need for a Savior. They simply think that they are pretty good eggs, better than most, and deserving of heaven. I know that this is true because I have asked hundreds of people over the years whether they thought they were going to heaven when they die. More than 75% give an answer something like the one just mentioned. However, God does not agree with that theology. For our Holy God, one sin is one too many for a person to gain entrance into a holy and sinless heaven. Understanding this concept often requires input from the Holy Spirit. Jesus put it best when he said to the disciples, *“It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.****8****And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment*.” (John 16:7-8) Once the Spirit convicts a person of their sin, of their need for salvation, they are ready to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.
2. **Ministry vs. the Devil:** The Holy Spirit currently limits some of the effects of Satan and his army of demons. It is true that God has allowed Satan the run of this planet “for a season”… but, of course Satan is limited in what he can do: “*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him*.” (Isaiah 59:19) Paul made this pretty clear in his letter to the church at Thessalonica. “*you know what is restraining him now* (the Holy Spirit) *so that he may be revealed in his time.* ***7****For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.”* [at some point in the future, the Holy Spirit will no longer be limiting the power of Satan on earth as he currently is doing – Holy Spirit filled Christians will have already been raptured during this seven year Tribulation]*“And then the lawless one* (Antichrist) *will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.* ***9****The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,* ***10****and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”* (2 Thess 2:6-10) We should recognize the fact that there are over two billion people who claim to be Christians in the world today. Even if only 75% are truly Christians, that still leaves over 1.5 billion Christians with the Holy Spirit living within. Obviously, that has a significant deterring effect on Satan. However, all Christians will exit at the Rapture; many believe this is at least one reason for the reduction in the influence of the Holy Spirit in the world during the Tribulation.
3. **Ministry with Jesus Christ:** God the Father sent his only begotten Son to earth to give his life as the ransom for many. As mentioned earlier, the New Testament speaks of several occasions of a personal interchange between the Son and the Father. However, generally, it is the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, who was tasked with the responsibility of helping Jesus while he was here on earth. He did so in a variety of ways as we shall now see.

Keep in mind how Jesus was conceived. “*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*” (Luke 1:35) So, we see that it was the Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to come into this world as God Incarnate. As the angel of the Lord told Joseph, “***that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost****.*” (Matt 1:20) When Jesus appeared at the Jordan River to begin his ministry, the Holy Ghost came upon him to anoint him, “*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him*…” (Matt 3:16) While preaching one day in his home town of Nazareth, Jesus quoted from Isaiah, *“****The Spirit of the Lord is upon me****, because* ***he hath anointed me*** *to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”.* (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus then told the crowd that Isaiah was referring to him all those years ago.

Jesus followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit throughout his ministry as he often limited his access to his own omnipotent powers while here on earth (as discussed earlier). For instance, “*But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come unto you*.” (Matt. 12:28) “*And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.”* (Luke 4:1) Simply put, Jesus was constantly **praying to his Father** and continually being **led by the Holy Spirit**… just as we all should be doing. The writer of Hebrews wrote that it was through the Holy Spirit that Jesus offered himself to his Father… “*How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God*?” (Heb 9:14) Let me mention just one more of the many times that the Holy Spirit took control in order to accomplish the needs of the Trinity. “*But if* ***the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead*** *dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”* (Romans 8:11) The Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus depended greatly on the Spirit while here on earth. We are supposed to follow the lead of Jesus… we need to pray frequently, study the Bible, obey Jesus, and give the Holy Spirit constant control over our lives. Is that easy? Not so easy… but absolutely the right thing to do!

1. **Church:** The Holy Spirit’s arrival on Pentecost heralded the onset of the New Testament Church. Jesus told his disciples that they needed to wait in Jerusalem for a little while as he was going to send them a Comforter soon after he returned to heaven. “*he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me;****5****for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* (Acts 1:4-5) Approximately a week after his return, Jesus delivered on his promise. “*When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.* ***2****And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.* ***3****And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.* ***4****And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues*.” (Acts 2:1-4) So we see that the Holy Spirit came to indwell the disciples, giving them great power and supernatural gifts. This new power allowed the disciples, now apostles, to begin spreading the gospel message, and the Church was begun. Peter gave an inspiring first sermon that day with wonderful results… “*And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and* ***you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit****.* ***39****For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."* ***40****And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."* ***41****So those who received his word were baptized, and* ***there were added that day about three thousand souls.****”* (Acts 2:38-41) As Peter explained, when individuals make the decision to trust in Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit will come and abide with them for the remainder of their lives.

A careful reading of the New Testament reveals that the Holy Spirit is involved in virtually every aspect of the church. The Holy Spirit led Paul to various and sundry places on his missionary journeys. In other words, the Holy Spirit decided where Paul would plant the first churches. Of course, even today, this is still an important responsibility of the Spirit. “*Now when they had gone through all Phrygia in the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but* ***the Spirit suffered them not****. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”* (Acts 16:6, 7, 10)

Of course, the Holy Spirit very much wants to be a part of every church worship service. “*And be not drunk with wine, where in is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*” (Eph. 5:18-19) Paul explains how the proper way to preach a church service is to be led by the Holy Spirit, “*and my speech and my preaching is not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*.” (1 Cor. 2:4) It should be our goal as Christians to be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our personal lives and in our churches. “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*” (Rev. 2:7)

Throughout Western Europe and, unfortunately, the United States of America, many churches have closed over the last fifty to sixty years. On the other hand, churches that preach the Bible as the inerrant word of God, and that recognize the importance and power of the Holy Spirit, have grown in number and size over that same period of time. Of course, that is not at all surprising.

1. **Gifts of the Spirit:** Still another wonderful ministry of the Holy Spirit here on earth, concerns his administration of spiritual gifts to the believer. Every person is an important individual in the eyes of God. God gives each person certain talents. Some may be great orators, others may be great athletes, others may be great singers, still others may be great writers, etc. When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit will bestow upon him/her at least one spiritual gift. All of these special gifts are intended to be used to glorify God. Of course, it may very well be that the Holy Spirit will use a natural talent and supernaturally expand it into a spiritual gift. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift… *“as every man hath received the gift, even so minister, saying one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*.” (1 Peter 4:10) On the other hand, no believer possesses all the gifts. This is an important point to make, because there are some who believe that each believer should have the gift of speaking in tongues. I don’t personally believe that is true for a couple of reasons, but biblically speaking, I would point to the following rhetorical question posed by Paul, “*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts.”* (1 Cor 12:29-30) The expected answer is “no.” Paul asked this question after making the point that the church is made up of people with different aptitudes and abilities. Together people make the church the institution that God desires it to be.

These gifts are to be taken seriously and used to glorify the Father and to build up the church. “*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*.” (Eph. 4:12) Paul lists ~20 spiritual gifts. These gifts are found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.

**A list of these gifts follows**:

* The gift of prophecy
* the gift of a apostleship
* the gift of miracles
* the gift of healing
* the gift of tongues
* the gift of the interpretation of tongues
* the gift of knowledge
* the gift of wisdom
* the gift of the discerning of spirits
* the gift of giving
* the gift of exhortation
* the gift of ministering
* the gift of administration
* the gift of showing mercy
* the gift of faith
* the gift of teaching
* the gift of evangelism
* the gift of pastor – teacher
* the gift of leading
* the gift of helping

A good Bible commentary on the three chapters listed immediately above this list will help the reader better understand the definition of each of these gifts. There is a significant difference of opinion on whether or not some of the aforementioned gifts of the Holy Spirit are meant for today – or were meant only for the apostolic period. Outstanding and brilliant Christians differ in their opinions on this matter. I certainly do not have any special knowledge from God concerning this issue. I do know that it is not a matter that should cause division in the church. I do not believe the Bible makes the answer to this question perfectly clear. Obviously, if it did, there would not be so much disagreement between strong Christians.

1. **Fruits of the Spirit:** Along with the gifts given to believers, the Holy Spirit, working through each person, desires to help them produce fruit in their Christian walk with God. It should always be remembered that the goal of every Christian should be to pursue sanctification – to become more Christ-like – as his/her life progresses. When this occurs, the fruit of the spirit will follow. There are many verses in the New Testament that speak about Christians bearing fruit. “*Ye might walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God*.” (Col. 1:10) “*We should bring forth fruit unto God.”* (Rom. 7:4b) “*every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purges it that it may bring forth more fruit.*” (John 15:2) “*I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abides in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit*.” (John 15:5) Paul specifically tells us about the importance of living and walking each day by having the Holy Spirit control our thoughts and actions… “*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.* ***17****For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.* ***18****But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* ***19****Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,* ***20****idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,* ***21****envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* ***22****But the* ***fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience (*or longsuffering*), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.****”* (Gal 5:16-23) So, let us make it our goal in life to live every day being controlled by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, show evidence, minute by minute, of the many different fruits of the Spirit of God.
2. **The Doctrine of Man:**

In any typical philosophy class, two of the more important topics discussed are “Does God exist?” and “What is the purpose of man?”… or, as some may put it, “What is the meaning of life?” We have just reviewed in significant detail the biblical answer to the first question. The Bible says that God has always existed and created the universe at some point in the past. Since the early part of the 20th century, scientific evidence has provided massive evidence for this Creator (i.e. God). As I have noted earlier, there are many excellent books on this subject for those interested in reading more about this topic. I have always been intrigued by this topic and my next book will be titled, “*The Philosophical, Scientific, and Historical Evidence for the Existence of God.*”

Now, it is appropriate to give the biblical answer to questions concerning mankind. How did we get here? Why are we here? What does the future hold? The Bible has answers to all of these questions. So, let us take a look at what the Bible has to say about:

* How and why were humans created?
* What is the nature of man?
* What is the purpose of life?
* The “fall” of man
* God’s plan for redemption
* The future of man

[Before proceeding any further, I want to point out that when I use the word “man” I am typically referring to the human race (men and women combined). The Bible uses it that way often and it is also often used that way in typical English usage. At times, I may use the word *mankind* or *humans* in its place]

**The Origin of Man**: There are four main views put forth to explain the origin of man. Since the first three of these views believe that macro-evolution was involved in the creation of man, let me define what that term means…

* macro-evolution - this is the term used to describe the process used to produce all living things from a one-celled organism – one species evolving into another, etc.
* micro-evolution- refers to varieties within a given type. Descendants are clearly of the same type (e.g. species) as their ancestors. This does happen and this is consistent with the biblical view of creation of man and all life.

**The following is a list of the four major views on the origin of man:**

* 1. Atheists believe that the entire universe and all within it came about purely by accident. After a very amazing biochemical accidental process, life began and through the process of macro-evolution, man eventually came onto the scene.
  2. Deists believe that God created the universe, but then allowed it to develop without his involvement. Hence, they believe in evolution.
  3. Theistic Evolution – God created the world and then used the evolutionary process to create all living creatures. There are some in this group who think that God may have intervened, on occasion, to create new species, especially man.
  4. The Biblical View – God created the heavens and the earth, followed by introducing all living creatures into and onto the earth as outlined in the first two chapters of Genesis. God created each individual species; macro-evolution had no role in God’s creative process. This is the only view that is consistent with the biblical record. Let us take a look at it more closely. Interestingly, it is now the only view that is consistent with the scientific evidence as well.

“*God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded,* ***according to their kind****, and every winged bird* ***according to its kind****.*” (Gen 1:21) God made a point of noting in his Genesis record that each species was created *according to their kind*… not created out of another species. He created man last…*“Then God said, "Let Us* ***make man in Our image****, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* ***27****So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* (Gen 1:26-27) God certainly did not say that the Trinity was going to take a one-celled organism and eventually cause it to evolve into a creature (man) that would be in “*Our image*.” No, instead, God states that after all else had been created, he would create man, and this creation would have a special relationship with him. In fact, man would be created in God’s image. Evolution is not consistent with the biblical account of the creation of life, leading to the creation of man. God created each species individually, not via evolution. As for man…*“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”* (Gen. 2:7) After God created man, he placed him in the beautiful Garden of Eden… “*The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed*.***9****And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* (Gen 2:8-9) *Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it.* ***16****And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may* ***freely*** *eat;* ***17****but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*" (Gen 2:15-17) Here we see that God placed Adam in a beautiful garden to live and enjoy. God gave him only one warning…not to eat of the tree of knowledge. If he did, he would die! Otherwise, Adam had complete freedom to enjoy his life to the fullest. At one point, God decided to give Adam a mate. “*And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’"* (Gen 2:18) “*And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.* ***22****Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man*.” (Gen 2:21-22) Adam and Eve are actual people of history. This is confirmed by their mention elsewhere in the Bible… they are even noted in the genealogy of Jesus in the third chapter of Luke. Jesus himself referenced the book of Genesis as referring to actual historical people and events.

So, in the earliest days after Adam and Eve were created by God, all was perfect. Initially, they had no guile within them. They were completely innocent. They were without flaw or sin. Certainly, a perfect God would not be able to create an imperfect being. However, it must be recognized that God had made the decision to create mankind with the capability to experience “love.” God is love. He did not create “robots” that would not be able to love him. By definition, if love is going to be a possibility between two individuals (including love between God and Man), then rejection/hate must be a possibility as well. Free will enables this situation to exist. People were going to have the freedom to truly love God – while that same freedom would allow them the freedom to reject God. Therefore, God most likely gave men and women free will so that they would have the opportunity to experience a loving relationship with their Creator, God. Truly, I do not see any other possibility – without the freedom to turn away from God, true love of God could not exist.

Possibly a reader of this treatise might ask, “Do humans really have free will?” Just stop and think for a minute. Does anyone have to love Jesus? Are all people given the opportunity to place their faith in Jesus? As it turns out, theologians differ on their answer to these questions. Therefore, the *Doctrine of Free Will* will be discussed in much more detail later. Of course, this free will did allow for Adam and Eve to disobey God… and eventually, they did so and with devastating effects.

Prior to getting into that issue, let us take a look at those questions posed earlier. How and why were humans created? We just mentioned how humans were created… God created Adam and Eve and their progeny are what we see on earth today. But why were humans created? The Bible makes it very clear that God is completely independent of any need whatsoever; if God needed anything, he would not qualify to be God. God must be all-sufficient, and he is. However, the Bible tells us that God created man for his own glory and pleasure. “*Everyone who is called by My name, Whom* ***I have created for My glory****; I have formed him, yes, I have made him*." (Isaiah 43:7) God also created man to have dominion over the earth and all therein… “*Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* (Gen. 1:26) We are supposed to do a very good job here on earth in all that we do… this will please and give honor to our Father in heaven. “*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*.” (Matt 5:16) God also created mankind to enjoy the rest of his creation. “*The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.*” (Psalms 84:11) “*the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.*” (1 Tim 6:17) One day in the future, God has an incredible inheritance for his children… God mentions this inheritance throughout the Bible. For example, “*In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,* ***12****so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory*.” (Eph 1:11-12) “*we are children of God,* ***17****and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”* (Romans 8:16-17)

If you take just a moment to think about it, there is quite a bit of similarity between the reason God decided to create mankind and the reasons an earthly father decides to have children. Any good father would want to have children that would bring honor to his name. He would want them to be a good person and do good works throughout their lifetime. He would want them to be able to take good care of themselves and be productive in this world. He would also want to provide them with a good inheritance at some point in the future. These are all things that our Father in heaven desires for us, also.

What do we know about the nature of man? For one thing, we know that God created man in his image. Theologians have had a variety of explanations on exactly what this means over the centuries. All we know for sure is that in some mysterious fashion, men and woman have some similarities to God. Many suggest that mankind’s self-consciousness and sense of morality may be partially what God meant by that statement. Our intellectual ability also may be part of the answer. The answer may go even deeper as well. We know that God is spirit. The Bible speaks of humans being made up of body, spirit, and soul. Maybe there is something about the spirit of man that God made in his image. Humans can communicate with God through prayer… spirit to Spirit. In any case, as opposed to animals, God made us in his likeness in some ways. It is up to each person to be worthy of that honor.

Some theologians believe that man is trichotomous, i.e. made up of body, soul, and spirit. They believe that the soul is that part of the person that includes his intellect and emotions. The spirit is a deeper aspect of a person that is involved in things such as communion with God. Others believe that mankind is actually only dichotomous – i.e. the soul and spirit are synonymous. There are Bible verses that are used to support each view. Excellent men and women of God are on both sides of this debate. I do not know the answer. I definitely do not believe that knowing the right answer is particularly important. If it is, God will let us know when we get to heaven.

I believe that it is pretty obvious to everyone that humans have been born with certain attributes that set them apart from animals. In particular, we have much greater intellect, a definite moral conscience, a true sense of God, and, unfortunately, an inherent tendency toward sin. All of these characteristics came from God… except the tendency to sin. More about that later.

Now that we have an understanding concerning why God created mankind and the nature of man, the next pertinent question that is often asked is, “What is the purpose of life?” I think the Catholics have a good answer to this question in their catechism. “To know, love, and serve God in this life, so that we can be happy with him in heaven.” I like to put it just a little bit differently. First, the purpose of life is to somehow find Jesus (this may be done through reading the Bible, Christian radio or television, attendance at church, being evangelized, etc.). Next, a person needs to make a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or to reject the gospel message. Then, if individuals accept Jesus into their heart, they should spend the remainder of their life working towards their sanctification. This is just an expanded version of the Catholic catechism.

**We are to seek out God**:

“*I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.*” (Prov 8:17)

“*you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart*.” (Jer 29:13)

"*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.****8****For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”* (Matt 7:7-8)

**We are to accept Jesus as our Savior**:

“*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*.” (John 3:16)

**Once we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are to work toward our sanctification**: “*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*.” (Eph 2:10)

"*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,****20****but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*.”(Matt 6:19-20)

**Our reward then awaits in heaven**:

*“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* ***3****And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* ***4****And where I go you know, and the way you know."* (John 14:2-4)

“*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.*" (1 Cor 2:9)

What a wonderful eternity God has planned for those who love him, and put their trust in him.

Initially, Adam and Eve lived a beautiful and perfect existence in the Garden of Eden. As you will recall, God gave them only one prohibition – they were not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That’s it… just that one prohibition. Also remember that God gave them both free will. Would they do as God commanded, and follow him in love for eternity in a state of eternal bliss… or not? The gift of free will is a good gift. However, how a person uses that gift may be another matter. If Adam and Eve’s decisions were always in line with God’s will, everything would have been fine. Unfortunately, responding to the tempting of the devil, they committed the first sin. Adam and Eve used their gift of free will and acted against the will of God. Wayne Gruden defines sin as “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.” Adam acted in a manner contrary to God’s will – i.e. he sinned.

The devil tempted Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil… “*the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.* ***5****For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* ***6****So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.* ***7****Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings*.” (Gen 3:4-7)

Some have suggested that a perfect, omnipotent God could not and would not allow humans to sin. We have to remember that God created mankind with free will, for very good reasons. This free will would allow for a beautiful, loving relationship between mankind and God for all eternity. Obviously, God also knew that this was going to bring problems. However, Adam’s sin and Satan’s sin were due to their inappropriate use of the perfectly good gift of free will. God cannot be blamed for their sin.

God also knew that ultimately he would accomplish his higher purpose. The fact that Adam and Eve sinned, and the fact that humans ever since have sinned - with the exception of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ - will not keep God from accomplishing his ultimate purpose for mankind, and the universe. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost always have things under control.

God has to punish sin. We will discuss this fact later in this treatise. God exacted his punishment onto Adam and Eve, and this punishment was to affect all of their progeny… the human race to come.

*"Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.* ***18****Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.* ***19****In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."* (Gen 3:17-19) Death became a reality for Adam and Eve and the human race. Difficulty and suffering became a reality for the human race.

If God did not have a plan of redemption, the life of all humans would end in death and punishment. Wonderfully, the omniscient God of our universe had an incredible, loving plan to redeem mankind. It would cost him the torturous death of his Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. Jesus would have to pay the penalty for the sins of the world by suffering the punishment for their sins. God was going to provide salvation for mankind – his creation. In fact, he would do all that was required for mankind’s salvation. All he asked of men and women was to have them accept his free gift of salvation. This would require faith… but he also would provide that faith.

*“For by grace you have been* ***saved through faith****. And this is not your own doing;* ***it is the gift of God,9****not a result of works.”*(Eph 2:8-9)

There is a great deal more to say about the lasting effects of Adam’s sin in the fall of man. There is even more to say about God’s beautiful plan of redemption. These will be taken up as we discuss several other doctrines of the church in subsequent chapters.

**Conclusion**: God created mankind (Adam and Eve) from the dust of the earth. He created them in his own image to take dominion over the earth and all within it. He placed Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden. He gave them free will, so that a loving relationship could develop between God and his creation. This good gift did allow for the possibility of sin. At some point, Adam and Eve disobeyed God (sinned) and were banished from this beautiful garden. This first sin brought pain, worry, toil, and death into the world. Fortunately, God has a plan for the restoration of a good relationship between God and man… a plan of redemption. We shall study much more about this later.

1. **The Doctrine of Original (Inherited) Sin and Sin:**

Although Adam and Eve were created in a state of perfection, they both sinned by exercising their free will to disobey God. They had absolutely everything going for them. However, after being tempted by Satan, they decided to disobey God. Satan had been thrown out of heaven for trying to be like God. His pride had destroyed him. Now, he would tempt Eve with the same lie… that she could be like God. “*For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*" (Gen 3:5) Eve decided that she would do things her way… she would not follow God’s simple command… as easy as it was to follow. Adam followed his wife into sin.

This disobedience, this sin, changed Adam, Eve, the human race, and the world in a significantly negative way from that point on. Mankind would now face the inevitability of death. No longer would man walk with God in a beautiful garden setting without fear, sickness, and anxiety. Instead, there would be a separation between God and man. The prophet Isaiah wrote, “*your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you*.” (Isaiah 59:2) Now, Adam and Eve were slaves to sin and Satan.

Adam and Eve experienced a sudden change in their human condition. For the first time, they experienced the emotions of shame and fear. “*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.* ***8****And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”* (Gen 3:7-8) God punished Adam and Eve. He sent them out of the Garden and…*“To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.”* (Gen 3:16) “*And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;* ***18****thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.* ***19****By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return*." (Gen 3:17-19) So, not only did Adam and Eve experience this “fall”, but so did the earth. Because of their sin, all subsequent generations of men and woman would experience suffering, the weariness of work, spiritual separation from God, and physical death. Adam’s sin was imputed to all of his descendants. This is sometimes referred to as the transmission of “Original Sin” or “Inherited Sin.” This concept may be difficult to completely understand, but it is true. Take a look at a few of the verses that reveal this truth:

“*I was brought forth in iniquity, and* ***in sin did my mother conceive me***.” (Psalms 51:5)

“*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* ***2****in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—* ***3****among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and* ***were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind****.*” (Eph 2:1-3)

“*just as* ***sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin,*** *and so death spread to all men because all sinned—* ***13****for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.* ***14****Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”* (Romans 5:12-14)

“*Therefore, as* ***one trespass led to condemnation for all men****, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* ***19****For as by the* ***one man's disobedience the many were made sinners****, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous*.” (Romans 5:18-19)

“*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*.” (Romans 3:23)

As with a few other doctrines that we will study, there is more than one opinion concerning this doctrine of original sin – or inherited sin. The two most reasonable viewpoints follow:

1. **The Arminian position**: Arminius taught that Adam’s posterity had their will to remain sinless markedly reduced because of Adam’s sin, but it was still possible that a person could remain sinless throughout their life. That is, that possibility, however remote, still exists.
2. **The Augustinian position**: The great St. Augustine’s taught that because of the human race being looked at as a unit by God, Adam’s sin was imputed upon all of his posterity. Therefore, all of Adam’s progeny would be born with a corrupted nature. This position is the one accepted by the majority of theologians today.

No doubt, some would say that this is not fair. Of course, everyone understands that parents do pass on to their children much of who they are. Somehow, therefore, it appears that a sinful soul is transmitted from sinful parents by the natural process of conception in some mysterious way. People are born with a sinful nature that, in and of itself, results in legal guilt before God. Also, this sinful nature will cause each individual, inevitably, to sin, as time passes. For any who doubt this, can you truthfully say that you have never had a sinful thought or taken a sinful action at some point in your life?

Frankly, it is fortunate that God does allow for the imputation of one person’s standing before God for another. Because of Adam’s sin, we are born with the sin nature. However, as we shall discuss in much more detail later, because of Jesus Christ living a perfect life, followed by his sacrificial death on the cross, those who place their trust in him have his righteousness imputed to them… and are saved for an eternity in heaven. “*For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.* ***22****For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.*” (1 Cor 15:21-22)

**The First Sin:** In the previous several paragraphs, the concept of “original” or “inherited” sin was discussed. Actually, however, the origin of sin came sometime before Adam’s first sin. Satan, once named Lucifer, led a revolt of angels against God in a ridiculous attempt to make himself like God. Prior to this terribly sinful action, apparently no sin had ever been committed. Ezekiel tells the story of Lucifer’s revolt (Ezek. 28:11-19).

“*You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.* ***16****"By the abundance of your trading you became filled with violence within, and you sinned; Therefore, I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you.”* (Ezek. 28:15-16)

Isaiah wrote… "*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!* ***13****For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north;* ***14****I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'* ***15****Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.”* (Isaiah 14:12-15)

**The Nature of Sin**: Anytime a person does something against the will of God, it is a sin. There is no doubt that sin is universal. “*For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.*” (Eccl 7:20) “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.” (Romans 3:23) As we have seen, even angels sin. One sin makes a person guilty before a perfectly just God. Of course, Adam and Eve are excellent examples of this fact. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. Sometimes doing nothing can be a sin.

Sins can be committed unintentionally. God said, "*If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity.”* (Lev 5:17)

**The Terrible Consequences of Sin:** If a person has committed even one sin, he is guilty before God. “*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”*  (James 2:10) The penalty for sin is death… even eternal death and punishment. Any person who dies without accepting Christ as Savior will face this horrendous future… “*the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" (Rev 21:8) Although it is true that any and all sins will result in eternal death and punishment, some sins are worthy of more punishment than others. Jesus referred to this when he was standing before Pilot and said, "*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has* ***the greater sin***." (John 19:11) Obviously, some sins are greater than others.

To continue in sin has adverse consequences while still on earth for the non-Christian. In other words, the Bible tells us that the unbeliever will have problems related to his sin, including: a lack of understanding of the truth, an inability to get all that one should receive from reading the Bible, a deceitful heart, an inability to receive good things from the Spirit (including greater understanding, peace, etc.), and a less than satisfactory prayer life… if any prayer life at all.

When a Christian commits a sin, he/she does not lose their salvation. However, our fellowship with God is adversely affected. Christians are subject to discipline as are all children… remember, God is a Christian’s father and “*the Lord disciplines those he loves.*” (Heb. 12:6) The Christian will experience a loss of the fruit of the Spirit, including joy, peace, love, confidence, assurance of salvation, fellowship, and more. The Christian will also have their ability to witness and serve the Lord affected by unconfessed and unrepentant sin… *“The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”* (John 15:4) Without a doubt, the effectiveness of a believer’s prayer life will suffer as well. Fortunately, all Christians can go to the Lord and receive forgiveness for their sins. “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) It is important for the Christian to repent of their sins and get back to their pursuit of their sanctification.

Some Christians commit the “sin unto death. “*There is sin leading to death*.” (1 John 5:16) “*For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.* ***30****That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”* (1 Cor 11:29-30)

Lucifer lost his exalted position in heaven because of his sin of pride. He took with him one third of the angels. All lost their heavenly position because of their sin. Eventually, Satan and these demons will end up in hell for eternity. “*The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* (Rev 20:10)

Even the world was significantly and adversely affected by sin. “*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;* ***21****because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.****22****For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now*.” (Romans 8:20-22)

**The Unpardonable Sin:** Jesus spoke of this sin. *"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.****32****Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him*.” (Matt 12:31-32) There are a few different opinions on what Jesus was actually referring to when he said this. I believe that Jesus was referring to a particularly egregious and slanderous rejection of the Holy Spirit’s work attesting to Christ, while attributing the power of Jesus to Satan. Several commentators go into much detail in explaining their views of this sin. I do think that Wayne Grudem is correct when he wrote, “the fact that the unpardonable sin involves such extreme hardness of heart and lack of repentance indicates that those who fear they may have committed it, yet still have sorrow for sin in their heart and desire to seek after God, certainly do not fall in the category of those who are guilty of it.” So, anyone who desires to accept Jesus as Savior could not have committed this heinous sin.

**Safeguards Against Sin:** Given the obvious harm that sin brings into each life, everyone should do all they can to stop committing them. The Bible tells us that we should be holy and just as God is holy, “*he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,* ***16****since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy*." (1 Peter 1:15-16)

The only way to lead a good life that will be pleasing to God is to become a Christian. Why? As will be discussed later, a person actually becomes a “new” person once he/she turns their life over to Jesus and the Holy Spirit comes to live within the individual – and will help lead that person toward sanctification (see *Doctrine of Sanctification*). In other words, the Holy Spirit controlled life is a better life in all important aspects – including the fact that it is a more holy life. As a Christian, a person needs to allow the Holy Spirit of God to lead them day by day and minute by minute. How is this best done? The following are a few good ideas to keep one’s life turned over to the control of the Holy Spirit:

1. Study the Bible regularly: “*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!*” (Ps. 119:11) *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,* ***17****that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*.” (2 Tim 3:16-17)
2. Frequent and fervent prayer is very important as we communicate with God and he with us (typically in subtle ways – his “still, small voice”). *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”* John 17:15)

The Holy Spirit has the power to help the children of God and he will answer prayer*. “'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts.”* (Zech 4:6)

1. Keep your thoughts and actions on proper things and to do good things. “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* ***9****What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things.*” (Phil 4:8-9)

**Victory Over Sin:** Ultimately, there is only one way to gain victory over the effects of sin. Contrary to the statements of many famous people in the world today (such as Oprah Winfrey), the only way is through Jesus. *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.”* (John 14:6) If a person accepts the free gift of eternal life from God, he/she will have victory over sin. Every person born will end up either in heaven or in hell… the only path to heaven is through Jesus.

1. **The Doctrine of Angels:**

God created angels as spiritual beings, and apparently they are male. They are all given male names in the Bible. However, the Bible never specifically states that they are all male. Should God desire, they can appear in human form as reported in the Bible (e.g. “*Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand. And he bowed down and fell on his face*.”) (Num 22:31) Angels have intelligence and moral judgment. They can follow God’s commands, and they can revolt against God’s will. Exactly when God created angels is not known. Interestingly, the book of Job has a clue related to this question. “*To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone,* ***7****When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”* (Job 38:6-7) This verse talks about God creating the earth. Apparently, while this was taking place, angels had already been created as they were shouting for joy at what God was then doing. Although this is not superb evidence, it suggests that angels had already been created early on in the first day of creation.

We do know that Lucifer, the chief angel, and one-third of all the angels sinned against God and were thrown out of heaven. Heaven is the home of the faithful angels, but they also have many things to do here on earth. The Bible never mentions how many angels God created. However, there are a very great number. This is known because there are several verses that mentions numbers such as “*the chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands”* (Ps. 68:17). There are many other similar verses.

Angels can communicate with humans by talking; they can appear as ordinary human beings. They are used by God to guard, protect, warn, and bring messages to people. For example, *“an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.’”* (Matt 1:20) and “*For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.****12****On their hands they will bear you up.*” (Psalms 91:11-12)

The Bible speaks of various types of angels. All angels are described as very intriguing and majestic figures:

* **Archangel:** a very powerful angel of high rank and used by God for difficult earthly missions. The Bible only mentions one archangel… Michael. He has had some battles with Satan… “*when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."* (Jude 1:9)
* **Cherubim:** these angels were placed as guards of the entrance to the Garden of Eden. *“He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”* (Gen 3:24) Two cherubim made of gold are placed on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant.
* **Seraphim:** these angels are above God’s throne and are constantly worshiping him. Interestingly, they have six wings, two to cover their face, two to cover their feet, and presumably two for flying. Isaiah heard them call out, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory*.” (Isaiah 6:3)
* **“Living Creatures”:** apparently a different type of angel, they are presented in *Ezekiel* and *The* *Revelation*. They have a variety of appearances, and they also worship God continually, never ceasing, “*holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*” (Rev. 4:8)
* **Guardian Angels:** Jesus said, when speaking about children, *“in heaven their angels always behold the face of my father who is in heaven.”* (Matt. 18:10) Therefore, we know that children have angels watching over them. No one knows how many angels are assigned to an individual, however. Be that as it may, it is nice to know that we do have angels watching over us.
* **The Angel of the Lord:** generally, when this phrase is used in the Old Testament, it is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ. On a few occasions, it is a reference to an actual angel. The context typically allows the reader to differentiate between the two.

Gabriel is mentioned frequently in the Bible and he delivers messages to people from God*.* Although Gabriel is not specifically identified as an archangel in the Bible, many theologians do believe that he is one. He obviously is a very important angel of God. *“And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings*.” (Luke 1:19)

**Characteristics of Angels:** Angels do not marry… as Jesus alluded to when he noted that when people get to heaven they will… “*neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven*.” (Matt. 22:30) Angels have more power and might, than humans. The Bible refers to angels as mighty ones who do God’s word. “*Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word*!” (Psalms 103:20)

While on earth, man has been made a little lower than the angels, at least in power and probably intelligence. “*What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him?* *You have made him a little lower than the angels.”* (Heb 2:6-7)

Angels were not created in the image of God, and cannot bear children. When angels sinned, they were cast out of heaven, and, as we shall see in the next section, their fate is sealed. **God is not sending his Son to sacrifice his life to redeem angels. The fallen angels will all eventually end up in hell for eternity.** “*God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”* (2 Peter 2:4)

Although we are made lower than the angels at this time, one day in the future, God will give us authority over angels. “*Do you not know that we are to judge angels*?” (1 Cor 6:3) During this current dispensation, angels are used by God to help carry out his plan for mankind, and the universe. Angels witness the actions of humans, and apparently have an interest in how each human lives his/her life. As the writer to the Hebrews stated, one can never know for sure when a stranger may actually be an angel…”*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”* (Heb 13:2-3)

Although angels may be incredibly imposing figures, they are not to be worshiped by humans. This was told to John after he bowed down to one of them, *“I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me,* ***9****but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”* (Rev 22:8-9)

Angels are still around today. It is possible that a person could have an experience with an angel. Unfortunately, it is also possible that a person could have experiences with demons. It’s very important to know the Bible well, so that you will not be fooled into a false belief should a person or a fallen angel try to lead you astray. As Paul said to the Galatians, “*but even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed*.” Although it should go without saying, angels are not to be prayed to either.

1. **The Doctrine of Satan and Demons:**

Satan is a miserable and terrifying fallen angel. He was named Lucifer before he rebelled against God. Satan has the dishonor of being the first individual in the universe to sin. Isaiah tells the story of his fall and future… "*How you are fallen from heaven, O* ***Lucifer, son of the morning****! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!* ***13****For you have said in your heart:* ***'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God****; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation, on the farthest sides of the north;* ***14****I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'* ***15****Yet* ***you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.****”* (Isaiah 14:12-15) Isaiah tells the reader that:

* At one time, Lucifer was a great archangel.
* His pride and rebellion against God led to his fall (i.e. he wanted to be God).
* He will end up in hell for eternity one day in the future.

Satan is a demon. He is the leader of the demons. When Satan was banished from his heavenly home due to his rebellion, he took along with him one third of the angels – those who had also attempted to rebel. Satan is called many different names in the Bible, such as:

* the devil
* the serpent
* the ruler of this world
* the prince of the power of the air
* the evil one
* Beelzebub
* the father of lies
* a murderer from the beginning

As can be seen by some of the titles above, Satan does temporarily rule over this world. Of course, God has ultimate control over what happens in this world, but God has temporarily allowed Satan a significant amount of power to wreak havoc. Satan and his army of demons use a variety of tactics to hurt people and keep them from Christ. They also come against Christians to *oppress* them by causing guilt, fear, confusion, sickness, and pride. Although Satan and demons do have a lot of power, they do have their power limited by God. They are far from being omnipotent. They cannot know the future, and they cannot know our thoughts. God, of course, knows our thoughts. Even though Satan and his demons can cause much trouble on this earth, Christians can fight back against them. James points this out in his epistle, “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”* (James 4:7) We need to learn from Jesus when he was tempted by the devil at the onset of his ministry. Take a look at the way Jesus responded to temptation by Satan:

* *“the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."* ***4****But he answered, "It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'* " (Matt 4:3-4)
* In each of three temptations by the Devil, Jesus responded by quoting the Bible… his last response was…
* *“the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.* ***9****and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."* ***10****Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written," 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'* " (Matt 4:8-10)
* We need to respond to the evil one’s temptations by using our knowledge of the Bible and tell the devil where to go… away from us because *“He who is in you, is greater than he that is in the world.”* (1 John 4:4)
* In fact, quoting from the Bible is an effective method of facing and resisting temptation. Remember, it is how Jesus faced this problem!

All throughout history there has been demonic activity. There are varying degrees of oppression by demons. A person may be so influenced by demons that they act wild and have little control over their activities. The Bible presents a perfect example of this… “*when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him.* ***5****Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones.”* (Mark 5:2-5)

Jesus cast out many demons during his ministry on earth. Here is one additional example, “*And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out,* ***24****"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are— the Holy One of God."* ***25****But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"****26****And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him.”* (Mark 1:23-26)

The activities of the devil and demons can be noted throughout the entire Bible. For example, in Old Testament times, when some of the Israelites turned from God to the worship of pagan gods, “*They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.”* (Psalms 106:37) Of course, the New Testament is replete with examples of demons and their activities. For example, in the book of Acts we read… “*the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”* (Acts 19:16) Peter told his disciples, “*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* ***9****Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

During the Millennial Kingdom, Satan and his demons will not have the run of this earth as they do now. Satan will be thrown into a bottomless pit… “*I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.* ***2****And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,* ***3****and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while*.” (Rev 20:1-3) After the thousand years, God will create a new heaven and a new earth… at that time, the devil will be sent to hell forever… “*the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* (Rev 20:10)

Satan and his demons are still alive and well today. Sadly, many Christians do not recognize that their lives and others can be adversely influenced by demons. On the other hand, there are other Christians who get carried away with thinking that demonic activity is responsible for most of the sin in the world today. The truth is somewhere in the middle.

It is not always possible to know whether a person is having problems with demon oppression. It may be difficult to know for sure. If one suspects that a person may be under some form of demonic oppression, it is appropriate to rebuke the potential demon in the name of Jesus. If the problem had nothing to do with a demon, no harm will come. If the person was being oppressed by a demon, great good could come from your command. We, as Christians, have been given the authority to rebuke demons in the name of Jesus.

When a person becomes a Christian, everything does not simply become a bed of roses. For one thing, as Paul wrote to the Romans, “*I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,* ***23****but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.* ***24****Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* ***25****Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin*.” (Romans 7:22-25) In other words, there will be a battle between our old nature and our new nature. The more we are able to turn control of our lives over to the Holy Spirit, the greater our success will be to live as Christ would have us live. Secondly, it is important that we do not forget the fact that Satan and demons do exist, and try their best to ruin lives for Christians and non-Christians alike. Paul warned those in the church at Ephesus when he wrote…

*“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.* ***11******Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.******13****Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* ***14****Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,* ***15****and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;* ***16****above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.* ***17****And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;* ***18****praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.”* (Eph 6:10-18)

Fortunately, Jesus came to save people from their sins while defeating Satan in the process. He accomplished this through his incarnation, and then by living a perfect life, sacrificing his life for humanity by shedding his blood on the cross for the sins of mankind, and, extremely importantly, rising from the dead on Easter morning. Jesus defeated the devil and death, itself. So, when all is said and done, each and every Christian on this earth will have total victory in Jesus.

1. **Doctrine of Atonement:**

So far in this treatise on the doctrines of the Bible, we have discussed God’s creation of the universe, angels (both good and evil), and mankind. A detailed discussion of the three persons of the Trinity has also been concluded. Unfortunately, all men and women have sinned, ever since the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Sadly, since that “original sin”, all people have been born with an inherent sin nature. The next topic to discuss will be the atonement that was provided by Jesus Christ that allows for the salvation of sinful human beings. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines atonement, as the “reconciliation of God and humankind through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.”

The first question that may come to mind is… “Why was it necessary for Christ to supply atonement for the sins of mankind?” Certainly, all throughout the Bible, God demonstrates his love for people – both Jew and Gentile. In fact, God is love. Could not God simply allow a sinful man or woman into heaven without being concerned with the fact that they had committed sins? As it turns out, the answer is “no.” You see, God is not only the quintessential example of perfect love; God is also always perfectly just. He cannot allow a sinful person into heaven… unless that individual has paid the penalty for his/her sins. Unfortunately, that penalty is death. Paul tells us in his epistle to the Romans, “*For the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23)

Therefore, the justice of God required him to find a mechanism that would allow him to bring salvation to the people he loved (all mankind) while still paying the penalty for their sins. It was impossible for sinful men or women to do this on their own. God’s decision was to send his only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life as a human being and then to sacrifice himself as a **propitiation** for the sins of all those who would accept his perfect gift (thus allowing for a change in God’s attitude toward sinful man from one of enmity toward us to one of acceptance). “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believe it than him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) You see, a perfect man, who was also the perfect God, after living a sinless life would be able to pay the penalty for imperfect mankind. However, this would require Jesus to personally pay the penalty for those sins and die. In fact, he would die the terrible death of the cross.

Of course, it should go without saying that God was not required to save anyone from his/her sins. However, given the fact that God loves men and women so very much, it is not surprising that he decided to provide a method of salvation for mankind. This was not going to be an easy task. It is interesting to note that Jesus, while in the Garden of Gethsemane praying to God, was not looking forward to the torture that he would face the following day (remember, he was 100% human while 100% God). In fact, he asked his Father in heaven, "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."* (Matt 26:39) Since that was not possible, the following day Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. After Jesus’ resurrection, he reminded two disciples that he met on the road to Emmaus that the Old Testament prophets had pointed to the fact that the Messiah would one day have to die on the cross for the sins of mankind. “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26) It is also interesting to note that Jesus followed that comment by teaching from the Old Testament concerning the prophecies of the Messiah (i.e. the prophecies relating to himself), “*And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”* (Luke 24:27) Paul explained the whole concept of atonement when he wrote to the nascent church in Rome to get them started off in the right direction and help them understand the New Covenant. He told them that no one would be saved by keeping the Law perfectly… that was not going to happen. Jesus was the only answer… “*Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight …….****21****But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed ….. even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;* ***23****for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ***24******being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*** (Romans 3:20-26)

Jesus did have to come into the world as a human and live a perfect life, while being subjected to temptation, sickness, fatigue, etc., just like all other humans. And he did do this… “*in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.* ***18****For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”* (Heb 2:17-18) In Old Testament times, God had his people sacrifice animals to demonstrate their allegiance to him. This animal sacrifice needed to be done over and over. Still, it could not really take away the sins of a person as… *“it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*.” (Heb 10:4) Therefore, God sent Jesus to be a one-time, perfect sacrifice…

*“it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.* ***24****For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;* ***25****not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another--* ***26****He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.* ***27****And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,* ***28****so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”* (Heb 9:23-28)

To secure the atonement for man, Jesus had to accomplish two critical tasks. Jesus had to live a life of perfect obedience to satisfy the requirements of the law and he also had to suffer while paying the penalty for our sins. This would only need to be a one-time sacrifice.

**Christ’s need to live a perfect life**: It is obvious that no human being has ever lived a sinless life, at least once they have reached beyond the age of accountability. Therefore no human is righteous before God on his own account. However, in the system of justice that God has deemed appropriate, a person can be accounted righteous because the perfect God/Man, Jesus, was willing to sacrifice himself for mankind. Since Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God’s law, he was able to earn this righteousness for sinful mankind. Paul speaks about this in his letter to the Philippians when he said that he, “*suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him,* ***not having a righteousness of his own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*.**” (Phil. 3:8-9) As was discussed earlier, the first sin by Adam was imputed to all mankind. We inherited that “original sin.” In a very analogous manner, God allows for sinful men and women to become righteous in his sight when they place their faith in the perfect righteousness of his son, Jesus Christ. *“By one man's disobedience* (Adam’s) *many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience* (*Christ’*s) *many will be made righteous.* ***20****Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,* ***21****so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace* (unmerited favor) *might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (Romans 5:19-21) I am sure that there are some who would suggest that mankind should not be penalized by “inheriting” Adam’s original sin – in other words, people should not be born with a sin nature. However, God is omniscient and omnipotent, and he sets the rules. The great news, however, is that God uses the same justice system to allow sinful mankind to “inherit” the righteousness of Christ purely through faith. We surely did not gain this righteous standing before God on our own merit.

**Christ’s need to pay the penalty for our sins**: God does allow for the righteousness gained by Jesus through his living a perfectly righteous life while on this earth to be imputed to those men and women who will trust in Jesus as their Savior. However, that still leaves mankind with a very serious problem… the penalty for the sins is death and eternal banishment to hell. God cannot simply ignore this issue. Remember, God is perfectly just and requires the penalty for all sins to be paid. As it turns out, sometime in eternity past, the three persons of the Trinity decided that Jesus Christ and would pay the penalty for mankind’s sins. Once again, we see that God allows for the imputation to certain men and women the consequences/benefits of a task completed by Jesus… i.e. to those who recognize what Jesus did for them and trust in him for their salvation. God allows Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins. He did this at Calvary.

Let me summarize the main points so far in this doctrine of atonement. First, we as a human race inherited the “original sin” of Adam. Not only that, but it is not possible for a person to live a life of sinless perfection. As the Bible says, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23)We cannot save ourselves. So, we have a very serious problem. However, we do have the opportunity, through faith, to be looked upon by God, as having the righteousness of Christ – as he led a perfect life, while on earth. Last, but not least, Christ was willing to take upon himself the penalty for our sins. Jesus did this at Calvary – he suffered a torturous death while paying the penalty for our sins. The Bible makes this clear. There are multiple verses that show that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, while dying on the cross at Calvary:

“*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* ***20****…..****21****For* ***He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him****.”* (2 Cor 5:19,21)

“***In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins****, according to the riches of His grace* ***8****which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.*” (Eph 1:7-8)

“*All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. … “it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.* ***When You make His soul an offering for sin***….. *by His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for* ***He shall bear their iniquities****.”* (Isaiah 53:6,10-11)

I believe that it is important that all people recognize what it meant for Jesus, to pay the penalty for our sins. We need to take time to understand the **physical torture** that he endured to save us. As the reader will recall, Jesus sustained multiple beatings and massive scourging of his body prior to being nailed to a cross. Then, of course, he suffered the horrible death of the cross. There are many books written about how painful it is to die on a cross. I believe that Mel Gibson’s movie, *The Passion of Christ*, depicts to a reasonable degree the physical pain that Jesus had to endure for us. Interestingly, the physical pain that Jesus endured was not as terrible as the **emotional pain** that he had to bear. Jesus was punished for our sin. We don’t know exactly how God exacted that punishment – but we can imagine that to pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind, this punishment must have been incredible. Paul wrote to the Romans that believers were *“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* ***25****whom God set forth as a* ***propitiation by His blood****, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance* ***God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness****, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”* (Romans 3:24-26) This verse shows that God was pouring out upon his Son his wrath for every sin that will ever be committed – those in the Old Testament times and all the sins to come… “*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”* (1 John 2:2) Easton’s Bible Dictionary defines what Christ did for us in defining the word **propitiation**… “because by his becoming our substitute, and assuming our obligations he expiated our guilt, covered it, by the vicarious punishment which he endured.” In other words, by Jesus bearing the wrath of God against sin, the justice required by God has been paid for. Therefore, God no longer looks at the faithful believer as a guilty sinner, but instead sees him/her as having the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Remember, “*the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.” (Isaiah 53:6) Not only that, but Jesus suffered courageously even though he could have stopped the torturous affair at any time. He told Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane… “do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? **54** How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" (Matt 26:53-54) However, Jesus had to go to the cross in order to pay the penalty for our sins. He did so willingly, *“when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;* ***24****who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness”* (1 Peter 2:23-24)

It is important to understand that Jesus only needed to give himself as a sacrifice (propitiation) for us this one time. Jesus, being perfect man, and God the Son was able to pay the penalty for sin with this “one-time” sacrifice. As mentioned a few paragraphs above, the writer of Hebrews explains this nicely, *He* [Christ] *has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.* ***27****And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,* ***28****so* ***Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.*** *To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”* (Heb 9:26-28) Paul adds, “***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2****For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* ***3****For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,* ***4****in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* (Romans 8:1-4) Christ died for us once and for all time.

The verses just cited, and many others in the Bible, reveal that God the Father did lay the sins of mankind onto Jesus while he was on the cross and punished Jesus for all of these sins. Christ was willing to take upon himself the guilt for our sins, and then deal with the terrible consequences of that guilt – death and punishment. There may still be some reading these words that wonder why Jesus would do this for a sinful world. The answer is simple. He loves us with an infinite love. Although the analogy is far less than perfect, hopefully the majority of parents in the world can have some limited understanding of that kind of love.

Jesus had to withstand the physical pain associated with the beatings he endured and the death on the cross; he had to withstand the horrible emotional pain of accepting the penalty that God exacted upon him for the sins of mankind; but, possibly worst of all, he had to suffer the **pain of being abandoned by his Father** for the first time ever. Literally, God only knows how horrible that must have been. We gain some insight from the anguished cry of Jesus, when he said, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matt 27:46)

Finally, just moments before passing from this world into the loving arms of his Father, Jesus recognized he had accomplished the enormous task he had been sent to earth to fulfill. He had come into this world as a little baby. He lived a perfect life, which was necessary to be our Savior. He then willingly gave his life to pay the penalty for our sins. And now, seconds before his death on the cross, Jesus proclaimed in victory, “*It is finished*!” (John 19:30) “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!*” (Luke 23:46) Jesus led a perfectly righteous life and had given his life for the world. The penalty for mankind’s sins had been paid. All that remained was for him to rise from the dead, and Jesus accomplished that defeat of death. If he had not defeated death, there would have been no hope for humanity. But, he did! The work of salvation had been successfully completed by sinful man’s Holy Creator.

Let me summarize the ideas involved in the atonement before moving on to another topic:

* Because people are born with the stain of “**inherited sin**” and because everyone **sins** during their lifetime, they are separated from God.
* Unless God were to intervene in the world, all humanity would die and enter into **eternal separation** from God – i.e. hell.
* Fortunately, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to be the **propitiation** (see definition above) for the sins of the world. Jesus lived a perfect life.
* Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by willingly **sacrificing** himself on the cross. He then conquered death as demonstrated by his **resurrection** from the grave.
* Christ’s perfect life, followed by his sacrificial death, has **reconciled** mankind to God.
* Those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, gain **redemption**, and will one day gain entrance into heaven, where they will spend an eternal life of blissful existence.

**Other theories on the atonement:** The above discussion concerning the atonement is typically referred to as the “substitutional” theory of atonement. It is the orthodox position taken by most conservative scholars. The following are a few other ways that theologians have looked at the atonement:

* **The Necessary-Satisfaction Theory:** Anselm (A.D. 1033-1109) was the primary proponent of this view of atonement. He held that God’s honor was offended by the sins of mankind. He could not allow entrance into heaven to these sinful men/women without Christ, his Son, paying the penalty of death for the restoration of this honor. Certainly, imperfect and sinful men/women could never pay the penalty God required to appease him and restore his lost honor. Only a perfect man/God was capable for paying this debt.
* **The Moral Influence Theory:** The French theologian, Peter Abelard (A.D. 1079-1142), first proposed this idea. Although God did not require any penalty to be paid for sin, he did want his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross as an example to sinful people of just how much he loved them… He loved them even to the point of allowing his Son to die the painful death on a cross. When a person recognizes the depth of that sacrifice, and looks to Christ with a loving and grateful response, salvation will result. There is no biblical evidence for this theory at all.
* **The Recapitulation Theory:** Church father, Irenaeus (A.D. 125-202) first taught that simply by Christ living through all the stages of a typical man/woman, i.e. birth, growing into adulthood, facing temptation, suffering, dying, and then rising out of the grave, He gained victory over death and Satan for mankind. He felt that the benefits that accorded Christ were then automatically given to men and women. Again, the Bible does not support this viewpoint.
* **The Ransom Theory:** Origen (A.D. 185 – 254) held the view that Christ gave his life on the cross to pay a ransom to Satan who otherwise would hold captive sinful mankind for eternity. This is in error primarily in that it teaches that it was Satan who required a payment be made for sin. In reality, it was God that required Christ to pay the penalty in order to meet his perfect justice requirement for entrance into heaven. People owe nothing at all to Satan… not even a ransom. Instead, it is God that we owe everything… including the requirement for Christ to pay the penalty for our sins.
* **The Governmental Theory:** Hugo Grotius (A.D. 1583-1645), a Dutchman, taught that the omnipotent God did not require any payment for the sins of mankind. He is all powerful and he can make the rules any way he desires. However, since God did decree that his laws should never be broken, he sent Christ to die on the cross to demonstrate that some penalty (in fact, a great penalty) need be exacted when God’s law is not followed perfectly. The fact that Christ went to the cross and died that horrible death was supposedly an example to mankind, not needed to pay any penalty for sin, but to be a deterrent to sin. There is little if any biblical support for this view.
* **Penal Substitution Theory:** Let me summarize the theory discussed at greater length earlier. The atonement concept that is accepted as being **most consistent with the Bible’s explanation** is that a loving but perfectly righteous and just God required an acceptable payment for the sins of mankind. Only Christ satisfied these requirements as He had lived a perfect life as a man (and as God the Son). Hence, when Jesus willingly gave his life on the cross and took upon himself God’s wrathful judgment for the sins of the world, he satisfied the demands of God for justice being served. God allowed his Son to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***9** *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.* ***10****For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.* ***11****And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”* (Romans 5:8-11) “*Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.”* (Gal 3:13) “*who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed*.” (1 Peter 2:24) God dearly loves us. However, he needed to satisfy his perfect justice in order to save us from our sins. Only by having the perfect God/Man Jesus, his Son, willingly sacrifice himself on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind, was this salvation possible. Thank God, Jesus loved the world so much, he gave his life for us!

**The Extent of Atonement:** There is a difference of opinion on just who Jesus died for on the cross – was it for all people, or only for those he knew would eventually be saved? That may sound like an odd question, but let me explain why theologians look at the atonement in these two different ways:

* **Unlimited Atonement**: Jesus died as the propitiation for the sins of all mankind, without exception. Let us take a look at just a few of the verses that people believe point to this idea of atonement:

“*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*(John 3:16)

“*And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Acts 2:21)

*“we have our hope set on* ***the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.****”* (1 Tim 4:10)

*“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,* ***4****who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.****5****For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,* ***6****who gave Himself a ransom for all…”* (1 Tim 2:3-6)

“*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”* (1 John 2:2)

“*Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”* (Romans 5:18)

There are over a dozen similar verses in the Bible that seemingly back the idea of unlimited atonement in the eyes of many scholars. There seems to be no mention of the atonement being only meant for a select group of individuals. Instead, a straightforward interpretation of these verses suggests that the sacrificial death of Jesus was meant for anyone and everyone… as long as they believe. As it turns out, there are two different ways of looking at this unlimited atonement – this will be explained in the next doctrinal discussion – on the topic of salvation.

* **Limited Atonement**: Christ’s atoning death was meant only for the elect (see below for an explanation of the *Doctrine of the Elect*. Charles Hodge explains why he takes this point of view as follows: "If God from eternity determined to save one portion of the human race and not another, it seems to be a contradiction to say that the plan of salvation had equal reference to both portions; that the Father sent his Son to die for those whom he had predetermined not to save, as truly as, and in the same sense that he gave him up for those whom he had chosen to make the heirs of salvation." There are many Bible verses that may suggest this as well…

*"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will* ***save his people*** *from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21)

*"...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a* ***ransom for many****."* (Matthew 20:28)

*"This is my blood of the covenant, which is* ***poured out for many*** *for the forgiveness of sins."* (Matthew 26:28) *"*

*“...and I lay down my life* ***for the sheep****." (John 10:15)*

*"Keep watch over yourselves and* ***all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers****. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."* (Acts 20:28)

**Conclusion:** It is really important to realize that the Bible obviously does not make the answer to this question clear enough for committed Christians to agree. Superb theologians disagree on this issue. Even more important, the answer is not of any great significance. There is no doubt about the meaning of certain verses…Never forget, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) or as Paul put it… “*For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’"* (Romans 10:13) Verses like these leave no doubt about the fact that anyone who turns to the Lord Jesus will be saved… i.e. the atonement is meant for him/her.

Not only that, but all Christians are called by Christ to witness to all people. When Jesus sent his disciples out to witness… and later the apostles, he did not tell them to be careful who they witnessed to… he told them to witness to all people. We are to tell the world about the gospel… and let the Holy Spirit decide who will accept this “good news” and who will turn away. Therefore, I believe the answer to the above question is really only a moot point.

Now that we have an understanding of what Jesus did to give us the opportunity to live in heaven for eternity one day, let us take a deeper look at the topic of salvation. Exactly, what must God do and what must we do to be saved?

1. **Doctrine of Salvation:**

Now that we have a more clear understanding of the atonement – and realize that Jesus has paid the penalty for the sins of the world – it is time to turn our attention to the tremendously important topic of salvation. How is salvation obtained? What is the role of God? What must a man or woman do to be saved? The Bible says, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*.” (Acts 16:31) How does one believe on Jesus? Let us discuss the whole topic of salvation in detail as it is so very important. In doing so, as will be seen, I will be presenting and discussing several other doctrines that fall within the overarching doctrine of salvation.

First of all, by now the reader understands that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and through his atoning actions, he has provided mankind with a pathway to salvation. It was apparently necessary that Jesus shed his blood because…

“*according to the law almost* ***all things are purified with blood****, and without shedding of blood there is no remission*.” (Heb 9:22)

“***the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin****.”* (1 John 1:7)

“*To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,* ***6****and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever*.” (Rev 1:5-6)

“*Jesus did indeed shed His precious blood on the cross*…*“one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out*.” (John 19:34)

We must understand that God has by far the most important role in the salvation process. God decided from eternity past those that he would “elect” for salvation. We have a role to play, to be sure, but only if God has chosen us to be “conformed to the image of his Son.” Salvation begins with election… without God first choosing a person to be saved, that person will not choose Jesus as Savior. This is an intriguing topic because it calls into question the whole concept of free will for mankind. There are basically two reasonable ways that theologians have looked at this through the ages. Let us now take a look at the controversial *Doctrine of Election*…

1. **Doctrine of Election (Pre-destination and Eternal Security)**:

The Bible makes it very clear that before the world was created, God elected certain people to be saved. That may surprise some reading this treatise, but it is absolutely true. Take a look at just a few of the verses that speak to this point:

“*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and* ***as many as were appointed to eternal life believed****.*” (Acts 13:48)

“*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.* ***29******For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son,*** *that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* ***30****Moreover* ***whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified****.”* (Romans 8:28-30)

*“****He chose us in him******before the foundation of the world****, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love****5******He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ****, according to the purpose of his will.”* (Eph 1:4-5)

“*In Him also* ***we have obtained an inheritance, being******predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will***.” (Eph 1:11)

“*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because* ***God from the beginning chose you for salvation****”* (2 Thess 2:13)

As can be seen in the verses above, the *Doctrine of Election* is closely tied to another intriguing biblical doctrine, the *Doctrine of Predestination*. Before going into more detail on the topic of election, let me say a few words about predestination. After that term is defined, I will continue the discussion on the topic of God’s *elect*.

Merrill Unger’s Bible Dictionary defines this term as follows: “**God’s total plan with respect to humanity is called predestination** or foreordination. His purpose to act in such a manner that certain men will believe and be saved is called election. His purpose to act in such a manner that certain men will disbelieve and therefore be lost is called reprobation.” Usually when speaking about predestination, it is in the context of salvation… i.e. God’s choice of the elect. However, predestination also can be looked at in a much larger context regarding how God is working behind the scenes (so to speak) to make sure his plans for individuals and the world come out the way he has planned. This absolutely requires the use of his attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. There is an amazing amount of evidence on the world scene and among individuals that demonstrates this “providential care” to be an actual fact. I will go into the topic of the “*Doctrine of God’s Providence*” later on in this treatise. The big question that concerns many people is how does God come to his decision on whom to choose as the elect? Also, if a person is saved, will they always remain saved? There is quite a difference of opinion on these topics. We will look at the most popular opinions in the paragraphs below…

In addition to those listed above, there are many other verses that speak about election (e.g. 2 Tim. 1:9, 1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 13:7-8, etc.). It should be clear that if God chooses some to be conformed to his image, he did not choose others. Why not? Paul asked that question when he wrote his letter to the Romans… then, immediately answered it… “*What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!* ***15****For he says to Moses, "****I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion****."* ***16****So then* ***it depends not on human or exertion, but on God,*** *who has mercy.* ***17****For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."* ***18****So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.* ***19****You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But* ***who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use?”*** (Romans 9:14-21)

There are varying views on exactly how God goes about electing people for salvation. The Bible tells us that God makes his decision based on his will (see Eph 1:5 above and the next verse shown below)… not on any good works that a person may do… or not do… in the future. “*though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—“* (Romans 9:11) So, we know that God does not elect people based on their future works any more than he saves us when we turn to him based on how good we have been during our life on earth. Paul, as is noted above, simply says that we have no right to argue the point as the Creator of the universe can do whatever he wants to do regarding this issue. God decides to “have compassion” on certain people for his own reasons… and has decided not to reveal those reasons in the Bible. God never tells us the inscrutable reasons why he decides to elect one person to be saved… and not another. That remains a mystery. However, I surely believe that there are some hints given.

Because I believe that God is perfectly just, always exhibits perfect love, and acts in a reasonable manner, I personally believe that God chooses people to be saved that he recognizes are the kind of people that would want to follow him. Since we all are given free will, those who God chooses will also choose him via their free will – of course, they do not know what God’s decision was in eternity past… i.e. the fact that God elected them before the creation of the universe.

Calvinists would reject my view. They believe that God makes his choice concerning the elect completely disregarding the likely future nature or likely future choices of any given person. My view is one formulation of a variety of Arminian views on the topic of election. The following are three views to consider, the first two are most often mentioned when speaking of *election*; the last viewpoint expresses my personal viewpoint:

* **Five Point Calvinism:** This is a very popular view of election, named after John Calvin (1506-1564), that often is remembered by use of the acronym, TULIP:
* **T –** Total Depravity of Man – mankind has been born into sin and is totally depraved even to the point where they cannot have the faith to come to God on their own accord and must have a Savior to be looked upon as being righteous by God.
* **U –** Unconditional Election – God does not choose an individual to be one of his elect based on anything inherent in that individual. He does not consider the plusses and minuses of the individual at all… He does not consider whether that person might have used his free will to trust in Jesus if God had not pre-destined that individual’s choice. John McArthur puts it this way, “It is the doctrine taught by Scripture throughout Scripture that God sovereignly, independently, uninfluenced by any other person chooses who will be saved and that that choice was made by God before time began, before the world was created in eternity past.” God simply chooses based on the kind intention of his will.”
* **L -** Limited Atonement - Jesus only died for those that were chosen in eternity past by the Trinity… persons known as *the elect* of God. His sacrificial death was sufficient for all people, but only efficient for the elect.
* **I –** Irresistible Grace – God offers a gospel call to all people. However, only the elect will accept his call to repentance… and they never will reject it – hence, it is irresistible.
* **P –** Perseverance of the Saints – all of the elect will eventually go to heaven. They cannot lose their salvation. They have **eternal security**. A true believer will always persevere to the end.

There are varying camps within Calvinism; Hyper Calvinism, Calvinism, and Moderate Calvinism. However, I believe that the TULIP acronym and its explanation above adequately explain the essence of what most Calvinists believe concerning election. Therefore, I won’t be going into the differences between these different groups.

* **Classical Arminianism:** As with Calvinism, there are differing views of Arminianism as well. I will review the view that most closely adheres to my own viewpoint.
* **Total Depravity of Man**: the belief that God must supply the faith needed to allow each of the elect to place that faith in Jesus for their salvation. Only God will regenerate certain people to accept his free gift of salvation. He does it through the third person of the Trinity working in every *elect* person.
* **Conditional Election**: Arminius wrote, “Predestination is the decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ, by which he resolved within himself from all eternity, to justify, adopt and endow with everlasting life, to the praise of his own glorious grace, believers on whom he had decreed to bestow faith.” He then writes that God’s decree to elect “has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who *would*, through his preventing [prevenient] grace, *believe*, and through his subsequent grace *would persevere*…he likewise knew those who *would not believe and persevere.* Hence, God elected the appropriate group for salvation.
* **Unlimited (but only the elect will accept it) Atonement** – Jesus died for all people. However, only the elect will choose to accept the gospel and be saved.
* **Resistible Grace –** Most forms of Arminianism believe that because God gives mankind freewill, they can and do (at times) resist and reject the call of God. These people are the non-elect of God.
* **Conditional Perseverance (Conditional Salvation)** – the only thing or individual that can cause a person to lose his/her already possessed salvation, is that person himself/herself. If saved people want to reject Jesus later in life, they can do so (they still have the free will to do so). Although Arminius did note many Bible verses that seemed to suggest that Christians could lose their salvation, he also noted many that suggest just the opposite. He really did not know for sure whether a person could lose his/her salvation or not… note this quote from his comments on this subject…‘I should not readily dare to say that true and saving faith may finally and totally fall away.’
* **My view:**
* **Total Depravity of Man** – (same as Calvinism and Classical Arminianism) Man needs a Savior!
* **Conditional Election** – (same as Classical Arminianism above) God is omniscient and certainly knows everything about every human being that will ever exist. I believe that his perfect love and justice causes him to use this knowledge when choosing his elect… in some manner that we cannot know or understand at this time (maybe we will when we get to heaven). By the way, **this conditional election does not mean that God chooses based on what he knows about our future works** (Paul points this out… “*when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,* ***11****though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call* - *she was told*, *the older will serve the younger*." (Romans 9:10-12) It is just too difficult for me to believe that God does not take into consideration the *tendencies* and *character* of each of his created children in deciding whether to grant them eternal life… or not. Of course, I may be wrong in this belief.

I will go into the reasons for my opinion on this matter in more detail when discussing the Doctrine of Free Will near the end of this book. I believe more explanation is in order to explain the reasons for why I take this view – these reasons relate to free will and God’s loving nature.

* **Unlimited (but only the elect will accept it) Atonement** – Jesus’ sacrificial death was sufficient for all people, but only the elect will take advantage of this incredible gift. Please take a look at the verses noted in the section above on the extent of atonement (p. 76) to see why I (and many others) believe in the concept of Jesus offering unlimited atonement.
* **Irresistible Grace** – I believe that God the Holy Spirit, works in the heart and soul of the elect to give them the necessary faith to believe… and they always do accept this gift of God. Those that are not the elect, are not given the needed faith to believe.
* **Perseverance of the Saints** – I think that once a person is saved, they are always saved… but, I sure would not bet my life on it. There are many biblical verses that seemingly suggest that once a person is saved, absolutely nothing (and no one, not even the person himself/herself) will keep him/her from an eternity in heaven. Although this is true, there are plenty of theologians who believe that God allows a Christian to exercise a free will choice to turn away from God. They point to many verses to support their view as well. I just feel that the evidence is a little more powerful for the once saved, always saved position.

So, interestingly, my thoughts on election and salvation have components of both Calvinism and Arminianism. It is critical to remember that it does not matter which side is closer to the actual truth as far as whether a person is saved or not – and no one should be dogmatic about these non-essential doctrinal points. Both sides of this issue agree about what one must do to be saved… let us get into that next.

**Conclusion:** We have spent a reasonable amount of time discussing the *doctrines of atonement and election*. We saw how Jesus came into this world and gave his life to pay the penalty for our sins while defeating Satan. *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,* ***God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,14by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross****.* ***15****He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”* (Col 2:13-15) Next, we noted that from eternity past God made the decision to choose an *elect* group of individuals for salvation… we understand that this is an inscrutable biblical fact to most people… yet, absolutely true. What else should we understand? For one thing, we need to understand the critically important doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without his resurrection, no one would be saved.

1. **Doctrine of Resurrection:**

Many books have been written on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Many of them do a fine job of showing the massive evidence that this wonderful event is truly an actual event of history. The New Testament writers give abundant testimony to it. I believe that the amazing change that took place in each of the disciples’ lives (as well as James, Paul, and others) after they saw the risen Christ is wonderful evidence of the veracity of that report. There is no way that those eleven disciples (plus many others) would have spent the remainder of their lives preaching the gospel message just to perpetuate a bold faced lie! On the contrary, they all eventually died horrendous martyr’s deaths (except John) because of their belief and trust in Jesus. It is possible that one of them might have been crazy enough to spend the rest of his life going around the world spreading a lie and then dying for that lie… but, not all eleven. No way. Jesus had to have risen from the dead that Easter morning. Having witnessed the risen Christ and being infused seven weeks later with the powerful Holy Spirit, those disciples (from then on to be called apostles) were totally different men from the timid and denying souls they had been. They all went out and changed the world for Jesus!

The entire New Testament is predicated on the risen Jesus Christ. It would not have been written if Jesus had remained in the grave. When Jesus rose from the dead on that Easter morning it was no coincidence that the Jews were celebrating their Feast of First Fruits… Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection of all who would follow him. He also had a glorified body. The Bible does not describe this body in detail, but it does give us some interesting clues about it. He was able to suddenly appear inside a room that had no open doors. He may have been able to somehow “walk through walls.” He could eat and drink and, of course, his body could be touched. In any case, Jesus had a wonderful, glorified body and those who trust in him for their salvation will have one like it one day.

Peter tells us that God has stored up for believers in heaven a wonderful future thanks to what Jesus accomplished for us in the resurrection, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* ***4****to* ***an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,5****who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* (1 Peter 1:3-5) Paul had similar words when he wrote his epistle to the Romans, “*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* ***5****For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”* (Romans 6:4-5)

Paul also writes that the resurrection of Jesus gives proof to the fact that we are justified in the sight of God the Father, “*It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,* ***25****who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification”.* (Romans 4:24-25)

So, one day in the future, Christians will pass from this life into the next and be transported into heaven because Jesus did it first…

“*he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.”* (2 Cor 4:14)

*“in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ***21****For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.* ***22****For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.****23****But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”* (1 Cor 15:20-23)

“if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” (John 14:3)

**Christ is our Mediator:** Now that Jesus has ascended into heaven, he continues to have several important roles to play concerning the salvation of mankind**.** Jesus was sent by God the Father to be a mediator between God and mankind. Job was hoping that this would one day become a reality when he spoke to God the Father and said, *“Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both.* ***34****Let Him take His rod away from me, and do not let dread of Him terrify me*.” (Job 9:33-34) In the New Testament, it becomes clear that this mediator is Jesus, “*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all*.” (1 Tim 2:5-6) In heaven, Jesus is our **mediator**. He is also our **righteousness**; He is our **defense attorney** before God; He is our **co-heir**; He is our **brother**; He is our **friend**; He is our **Lord,** and He is our **Savior**.

So now we see that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father, in heaven. He has accomplished his incredible task of living a perfect life on earth, then sacrificing his life while paying the penalty for the sins of mankind. He has assumed his role as Mediator for the elect and God has imputed his Son’s righteousness upon all Christians. How can we take advantage of all that God has done for us? Don’t we have anything to do concerning our own salvation? As will become evident soon, we do need to come to Jesus in faith and ask him, with a penitent heart, to be our Savior. Not surprisingly, however, God even does all of the *work* in that area as well.

1. **The Doctrine of Regeneration (being Born Again):**

God’s wonderful and merciful plan for the atonement of mankind was outlined in the doctrines just discussed above. We saw that from eternity past God recognized that every person would sin and fall short of the perfection required to spend an eternity with Him in heaven. However, because of his infinite love for us, he offered up his Son as the necessary and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. In the doctrines that follow, the details of how God accomplishes the transformation of spiritually dead men and women into new, “born again” individuals is presented. The doctrines of regeneration (being born again), repentance, and placing faith in Jesus for salvation will be discussed.

Interestingly, the exact *sequence* of how this transformation takes place is not agreed upon by theologians. Once again Calvinists have a different view than many other fine Christian scholars. Both views will be presented and the reader can decide which he prefers to believe. Fortunately, this is just one more of those theological issues that is of no great importance. All Christian scholars agree that repentance and faith in Jesus as Savior is required for salvation and that all Christians must be born again. Let me begin now by presenting the Calvinist view on the sequence of these events, followed by the sequence proposed by biblical scholars with an opposing viewpoint.

Calvinists believe that being “**born again**” can be more completely defined as the spiritual change that God brings to the heart of a man or woman to change his/her inherent sin nature to a nature that is able to respond to the gospel message in faith. The cause of this change is God, and it involves a change in the nature and will of the man or woman. God acts to do this because of His love and mercy as He wants to bring salvation to His elect. The Holy Spirit is primarily the person of the Trinity that brings this regeneration to mankind. Once a man/woman is born again, a person can respond in faith to the gospel message in a positive manner… and always will.

Jesus told Nicodemus all about the need for regeneration… *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."****4****Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* ***5****Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.****6****That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”*(John 3:3-6) We are not supposed to understand how the Spirit completes this necessary change in our spirit, “Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."(John 3:7-8)

And Paul later added much more on this topic of regeneration – the new birth:

“*And you,* ***being dead in your trespasses*** *and the uncircumcision of your flesh,* ***He has made alive together with Him****, having forgiven you all trespasses.”* (Col 2:13)

**“*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation****; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* ***18****Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ*.” (2 Cor 5:17-18)

*“For it is the* ***God who commanded light to shine out of darkness****, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Cor 4:6)

*“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,* ***5****even when* ***we were dead in trespasses****,* ***made us alive together with Christ****…”* (Eph 2:4-5)

*“And you* ***He made alive, who were dead in trespasses*** *and sins.”* (Eph 2:1)

The above verses, and many more like them, point to the fact that we are all “dead in sins” and unable to respond to God until we are born again (regenerated – given a new life - by God).

After a person experiences this regeneration, or new birth, he/she is ready to turn from his/her sins and make Christ the Lord and Savior of his/her life. Although we have to be born again before our nature is capable of wanting to turn to Jesus in faith, the saving faith given us by the Holy Spirit comes right after the new birth. Then, God will, invariably, bring us into a saving relationship with his Son. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” (John 6:44*) “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”* (Acts 16:14) In these two verses, we see that God worked on the hearts/spirits of the people referenced to regenerate them. Only then (but very soon after this re-birth) were they ready to follow Jesus in faith. In other words, **once we are born again we are immediately given the faith necessary to ask Jesus into our lives –** **these two separate events are seemingly synonymous to the individual**.

So far, everything I have been writing about concerns what God does to ensure the salvation of a certain number of His children. He chooses those who will be the elect. He sent his only begotten Son, Jesus, to be the sacrificial Lamb for humanity. Jesus came to earth and did all that was required of Him to provide atonement for the sins of the world. The person of the Holy Spirit of God also has an important role to play by reaching the elect to give them the faith they require to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Again, all of this was provided to us by God. So, I still have not mentioned where we come in to the process of salvation? What is our role to play in this incredibly important journey of life?

1. **The Doctrines of Repentance and Faith:**

According to the Calvinist view, once God changes a person via regeneration (i.e. they are born again), the next step toward salvation is for that person to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit by ***faith***. This is done by ***repenting of the sin*** in one’s life, followed by trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Repentance is not simply being sorry for one’s sins. The Greek word for repentance means “to reconsider” or to “change one’s mind” and feel remorse for previous actions. Biblical repentance is a call for a person to make a conscious decision to make a 180 degree change in his/her life and to be truly sorry for past sins, with a sincere desire to live a Christ honoring life in the future. There will be an obvious turning away from those thoughts and actions that ruled one’s old life to a new life of trust and obedience to God and his commands. The penitent person needs to surrender to God as Sovereign Lord of his/her life and make a sincere attempt to live a life pleasing to him. As you see, this is a big step and should not be taken lightly. The new Christian must realize his need for a Savior and then ask Jesus into his life… placing his faith in Jesus and trusting in our Lord’s sacrificial death on the cross for eternal salvation. This repentance, often coupled almost immediately by faith in Jesus, results in ***conversion***.

There are some theologians who believe that prospective Christians need only ask Jesus to be their Savior… and not ask him to be Lord of their life. I do not believe that a person can have a saving relationship with Jesus and not have him be Lord of that life as well. I suggest that since Jesus is God (Lord of all), that once he becomes the Savior to a person, once the Holy Spirit comes to live within a person, God will assume his rightful role of Lord of that life as well. Secondly, if a person is *truly penitent* and really has decided to turn his life around because of his love for Jesus, he will want Jesus to be Lord over all that he does. In other words, it may well be true that making Jesus Lord of one’s life is essentially a direct result of repentance. Frankly, we are to come to Jesus and trust our entire future to him… as we become new creations in Jesus. We are then to rest in His loving arms.

So, we are to repent (turn away from sin) and then come to Jesus in faith (turning toward Jesus).

*“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”* (Acts 3:19)

“***godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation***.” (2 Cor 7:10)

*“when the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it.”* (Ezek 33:19)

Once a person does trust and believe in the gospel, he/she is saved eternally and becomes a new creation in Jesus…

“*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*.” (John 3:16)

“*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.****29****Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*.” (Matt 11:28-29)

**“*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation****; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* ***18****Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ*.” (2 Cor 5:17-18)

Paul explained the process of salvation very clearly in his letter to the church at Ephesus when he wrote, *“For by* ***grace*** *you have been saved through* ***faith****, and that not of yourselves; it* ***is the gift of God****, not of works*.” (Eph 2:8-9) This verse is a “goldmine” of truth about our salvation. Note that salvation is provided by God’s unmerited favor (i.e. grace) – definitely not related to anything we do at all. We cannot work for it; we can do nothing to deserve it – it is purely a gift from God. There is one thing that we do have to do when presented with the opportunity of salvation… we must put our faith in the gospel message and accept the finished work of Jesus at the cross. We must recognize that our only hope for salvation is through the finished work of Christ. We cannot do it ourselves. We must put our faith in Jesus to take care of our future. Yet, as this verse and many others show, even this faith that we must exercise is yet another great gift from God!

In the foregoing paragraphs, we have seen that once people receive the new birth (regeneration), they are literally new creatures (born again) and will invariably then repent and turn to Jesus in faith. This will result in their salvation. Note that God supplied everything needed for this wonderful transformation. It is true that we must come to Jesus in faith, but God will provide the faith for those of the elect to do so… Paul had much to say about this in his epistles…

*“****Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith****, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.”* (Heb 12:2)

*“****God has dealt to each one*** *a measure of* ***faith***.” (Romans 12:3)

*“****faith comes by*** *hearing, and* ***hearing*** *by* ***the word of God***.” (Romans 10:17)

Calvinists are typically adamant about the need for sinners to be born again as the initial event in coming to God in faith. Prior to that gracious act of God, the individual is spiritually dead and not able to respond to God in faith. Not all agree with that sentiment. Millions of Christians believe that God provides for our salvation in a different manner/sequence. Let me now point out this difference in the paragraphs that follow…

Although it is true that fallen mankind is spiritually dead, it does not mean that they are actually dead. Prior to their regeneration, men and women still have the ability to learn, reason, and understand many things. That would seem to be pretty obvious. Therefore, God is able to show the sinner that he in need of a Savior. God is able to bestow upon sinful people the requisite faith to believe on his Son for their salvation. In fact, whereas Calvinists insist that God must regenerate those of the elect before he gives them the faith to believe, others believe that the understanding of the need for repentance, followed by faith in Jesus is what results in the new birth… i.e. the new birth is not their cause. Of course, it must be understood that it is God who grants the elect the faith to believe.

It seems to those with this mindset that since the central doctrine of Christianity is the cross of Christ, our knowledge and acceptance by faith of the finished work of Jesus on that cross will be what leads to our immediate regeneration. It seems strange that a person could be born again without recognizing his need to repent and without already having turned to Christ in faith. Admittedly, Calvinists say that repentance and faith almost always follow immediately after regeneration; however, they still do *follow* it. In their view, repentance and faith do not result in the new birth. If their theology is correct, a person is born again without first knowingly repenting of their sin and without yet having faith in Christ for their salvation.

Let us take a look at what the Bible has to say about the order of faith and the new birth…

“Verily, verily I say unto you, He that **believeth** on me hath everlasting life.” (John 6:47)

“For **whoever shall call** upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Rom. 10:13)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth** in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

“Whom not having seen, ye love, though now ye see him not, yet **believing**….. receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” (1 Pet. 1:8,9)

“But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, even to **them that believe** on his name: Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13)

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) (This verse does not say that our faith comes from our regeneration)

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved**…” (Acts 16: 30-31)

“But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that **believe** to the saving of the soul.” (Heb. 10:39)

“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ… after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also **after that you believed, you were sealed the Holy Spirit of promise**.” (Eph. 1:12-13)

“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to **save them that believe**.” (1 Cor. 1:21)

The important point is that the verses above and many others like them do not suggest that *those who have been regenerated (born again) will then be saved.* No, instead all of these verses tell the reader that it is the faith of the elect person that results in their salvation and regeneration.

Arguably the greatest preacher of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon, put it this way, “In our day certain preachers assure us that a man must be regenerated [born again] before we may bid him believe in Jesus Christ; some degree of a work of grace in the heart being, in their judgment, the only warrant to believe. This also is false. It takes away a gospel for sinners and offers us a gospel for saints. It is anything but a ministry of free grace. If I am to preach the faith in Christ to a man who is regenerated, then the man, being regenerated, is saved already, and it is unnecessary and ridiculous thing for me to preach Christ to him, and bid him to believe in order to be saved when he is saved already, being regenerated. Am I only to preach faith to those who have it? Absurd, indeed! Is not this waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him medicine? This is preaching Christ to the righteous and not to sinners.”

Let me summarize the two different concepts concerning the meaning and significance of being born again:

* Calvinists are convinced that all people, including the elect, are dead in sin and simply cannot respond to any gospel call. However, there will come a point in time when God will regenerate each of the elect (i.e. they will be born again). In that instant, they become new creations in Christ – they will be given a new spirit. Also, from that instant forward, these individuals will have the capability to recognize their need for a Savior, repent of their sins, and turn to Jesus in faith. Upon doing this, they will experience the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for the remainder of their lives.
* Many other theologians believe that God moves over time to give his elect an adequate amount of understanding and faith to understand their need to repent and accept Jesus as personal Savior and Lord. Once they do this, and only after this is done, they will become born again (God will regenerate their spirit). This results in their eternal salvation and the Holy Spirit comes to live within each saved person for the remainder of their lives.

As can be seen, these are two different views of what it means to be born again. Yet, in both cases, it is recognized that all Christians must be born again… just as Jesus told Nicodemus. I believe that faith does precede regeneration… I think it makes more logical sense and is more consistent with what is found in the Bible on this topic. However, I may be wrong.

Since we are all saved entirely due to the wonderful grace of God, it is important that we now take a little time discussing the wonderful *Doctrine of Grace*.

1. **Doctrine of Grace:**

**Grace** – unmerited favor. As explained above, God grants mankind salvation purely out of love and not because of anything we do to earn it. It is a gift of God.

“*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.****”*** (Titus 2:11-12)

“*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 6:23)

*“if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace*” (Romans 11:6)

Earlier in this treatise, I listed and defined a great many attributes of God. Two of these attributes were “love” and “mercy.” God is a God of love and he is very merciful toward mankind. God, as I will discuss in more detail later, made us in such a way that we would be able to actually respond in some small way and express our love for him as we experience and appreciate his love for us. We are not made to be robots. God also was aware that we would fail to obey him… i.e. Adam and Eve would sin, and their sin would lead to the fall of all mankind. However, he loved us too much to give up on us. His infinite mercy led him to extend his grace to the elect. We did nothing to deserve the incredibly merciful gift of the atoning work of Jesus… that is why it is called grace (unmerited favor).

God is merciful to us as sinners in that he does not give us what we deserve. Instead, when we trust in his Son for our salvation, he pours out his favor on us and gives us the wonderful gift of eternal life in heaven. When we turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved, pure and simple. We experience *conversion*. We have then become a Christian. Why is that so? The Bible says that by trusting in Jesus as Savior, we have become justified before God.

1. **The Doctrine of Justification: being declared righteous:**

When God looks at this new “creation” – this new Christian, he sees him through the prism of his Son, Jesus. From God’s legal point of view, he has been declared righteous because Jesus truly was righteous and Jesus is standing in the Christian’s place. That is the desire of Jesus. We are no longer judged as lost sinners, because we are no longer under the Law. Instead, we are now judged based on the merits of our Savior. Jesus has his righteousness imputed to his children. In God’s legal system, this is perfectly appropriate to do. Remember, God decides what is legal and what is not. For basically the same reasons God imputed Adam’s sin onto all mankind after Adam, he imputes Jesus’ righteousness onto all those who trust in him for their salvation. Again, we do not work for our righteousness (we could never obtain it via work), but we accept this righteousness as the free gift coming from the grace of God. In fact, if we have any inkling that we must work for this gift or that we have worked to deserve any aspect of our salvation, God says that we will be judged by our works… and that would spell doom (see Romans 4:4 below)! There are many verses that speak to the topic of God imputing Christ’s righteousness on the believer… and the need to recognize that this is done solely by the grace of God… and it is not based on our works. Even Abraham had righteousness imputed to him by God because of his faith… not his works.

*“if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* ***3****For what does the Scripture say? "****Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness****."* ***4****Now* ***to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.*** *And* ***to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness****.”* (Romans 4:3-5)

*“For* ***Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes****.”* (Romans 10:4)

*“****a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ***.” (Gal 2:16)

*“the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.* ***25****But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor*.” (Gal 3:24-25)

*“since we have been* ***justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ****.* ***2****Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”* (Rom. 5:1-2)

*“the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed… through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all believe…. all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ***24****being* ***justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,****whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness.”* (Romans 3:21,23-25)

*“we conclude that* ***a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law****.”* (Romans 3:28)

1. **The Doctrine of Adoption:**

After new believers place their trust in Jesus, they are brought into the family of God as adopted sons and daughters. We become brothers and co-heirs with Christ. Our destiny is secure – outstanding support as a child of God while here on earth, followed by a wonderful eternal life in heaven. “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,* ***13****who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* (John 1:12-13) Sadly, for those who reject the free offer of salvation via the grace of God, this is certainly not the case. Paul reminded his Christian audience about this when writing his epistle to the Ephesians with these words, “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins* ***2****in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—  among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*” (Eph. 2:1-3) In that same letter, he added, *“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”* (Eph 5:6)

Paul then goes on to explain how we not only are adopted children of God, but also co-heirs with Christ. “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.* ***15****For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but* ***you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father.****"* ***16****The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that* ***we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.****”* (Romans 8:14-17) Of course, that means that fellow Christians are also our brothers and sisters. We should treat them as such.

We will not receive the full benefits of our adoption into the family of God until we arrive in heaven one day. Even so, as an adopted son or daughter of God, we enjoy many benefits during our life here on earth. For example, we have the Holy Spirit living within us as a comforter and advisor and the seal of our salvation. We can go to God in prayer at any time – to worship him and thank him, to praise him for all he has done for us, to plead with him for answers to the difficult problems in our lives, and simply to talk to him on a daily basis. Of course, we can always pray to him for help with our daily needs. God will give us many good gifts, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matt 7:11) God has already forgiven the Christian of his/her sins. The believers already have an inheritance in heaven. All Christians should “*be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*.” (2 Tim 2:15) Our goal in life should be to allow the Holy Spirit to control every aspect and minute of our existence. Bible study and prayer are two extremely important avenues towards reaching this goal. As a loving and perfect father, God will discipline his adopted children when needed in order to help them become better people. The writer of Hebrews explained this well when he wrote, “***My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." 7******It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?****If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?  For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”* (Heb 12:5-11) He was absolutely correct when he noted that no good father would spare appropriate discipline for his imperfect children. It is important to teach a child while they are growing and developing so that they will end up being fine adults. God wants us to be excellent Christian children, and therefore he disciplines us when appropriate. Of course, all of God’s discipline is perfect and is not meant to harm us in any way. It should be every Christian’s goal to become more like Jesus Christ each and every day of their life. We are, indeed, supposed to work to accomplish that goal. This work is referred to as pursuing sanctification. We are saved solely via the grace of God *“through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Eph. 2:8-9) However, once saved, God wants us to put effort into becoming the best Christian person we can be. The topic of sanctification will be the next doctrine that we will study.

Before doing that, let me summarize the manner by which God saves his people from their sins. Take a look at the list that follows…

**SALVATION INVOLVES**:

1. **Election** from eternity past by the Trinity – some being **predestined** for salvation
2. Creation of the world and man
3. The Fall of Man – **inherited sin is imputed** to all mankind
4. **Jesus** comes into the world, lives a perfect life, and then gives his life on the cross as the **sacrificial Lamb**.
5. **Jesus is** **resurrected** from the dead and ascends into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God.
6. God accepts his **atonement** for our sins. **Jesus is the** **propitiation** for our sins.
7. At some point, through the process called **regeneration**, the elect are **born again**. God provides this regeneration primarily through the person of the Holy Spirit… although God the Father may play a role as well.
8. Calvinists believe that the born again individual **repents** and places his God given **faith** in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This process is referred to as **conversion**. Many others theologians are convinced that God gives his elect the **faith** to repent and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior… which then immediately results in their being born again. In any case, only God’s unmerited favor (his **grace**) made this possible.
9. God **justifies** penitent sinners and **imputes** to them the **righteousness** **of Christ**.
10. The sinner thus gains **redemption** and is **adopted** into the family of God and he becomes a co-heir with Christ.
11. **The Doctrine of Sanctification:**

No human that has ever existed has been able to secure his own eternal life in heaven. None have been able to live a life without sin… and, as has been shown, all have been born with the stain of “inherited sin.” Fortunately, God decided before the creation of the world that he would do all that was necessary to provide us with a sure pathway to salvation. As we have just seen, God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit all worked together to provide everything necessary for people to gain salvation. All that a person has to do is to place his/her faith in Jesus and his finished work on the cross, and he/she will one day spend eternity in heaven. Amazingly, God even provides the faith for his elect to believe! That being true, we can say that God is behind every aspect of the salvation of mankind.

It is true that a person does have to exercise their free will to place their God-given faith in Jesus… we should certainly not forget that. Also, it should be understood that after one’s conversion and then adoption into the family of God, he does not expect his new child to simply sit back, live the “life of Reilly”, and then die and go to heaven. No, once people become Christians, God expects them to spend the remainder of their lives working to become more like Jesus. The dictionary defines biblical sanctification as the state that God intends a Christian to be in and used for the purpose that God intended… i.e. a Christian is to be holy. The process used to pursue this state is referred to as the process of **sanctification**.

It is most certainly true that there is absolutely no work involved in obtaining one’s salvation. However, I would like to suggest to all people that believe they are saved, and at the same time do not desire to live a Christ honoring life, that they look deeply into their soul to see if they really have repented of their past sins. Remember, if this truly has been done, it is a life altering transformation, a 180 degree turn toward Christ and all that he stands for while putting the sin of the past behind, forever. Jesus reminds us all that if we truly love him, we will obey him.

*"If you love Me, keep My commandments.”* (John 14:15)

“*Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God*.” (1 John 3:9)

“*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”* (James 1:22)

*“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,* ***16****and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?* ***17****Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* ***18****But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and* ***I will show you my faith by my works***.” (James 2:15-18)

Note how these verses reveal that a true saving faith in Jesus Christ will be manifested by a changed life and a life that is honoring to God. How is your life stacking up? Are you obeying Jesus?

Of course, this does not mean that anyone will reach the perfection of Jesus… but, we should spend the rest of our lives trying to please him and be more like him. Again, this process is called working toward our sanctification. This is a job that requires a combined effort of man and God. We shall take a closer look at this lifelong process.

Sanctification begins as soon as a person is adopted into God’s family… i.e. as soon as one becomes a Christian. The process is life-long and although it should, of course, go on an upward path toward holiness, there will be undulations as one goes along. No Christian should be a slave to sin. Since they have repented and received the Holy Spirit upon conversion, they are now a new person in Christ. As Paul wrote to the Romans,

*“our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that* ***we should no longer be slaves of sin****. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord……* ***12****Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.* ***13****And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but* ***present yourselves to God*** *as being alive from the dead, and your members* ***as instruments of righteousness*** *to God.* ***14****For* ***sin shall not have dominion over you****, for you are not under law but under grace*.” (Romans 6:6,11-14) God wants us to remember that, “*Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”* (Romans 6:16) Once individuals give their lives to Christ, it is imperative to put their old lives behind, and strike out in a new direction. Our goal should be to become better people as we age… we need to strive to become more and more like Christ since “*having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”* (Romans 6:18) As we do our part toward this goal, the Holy Spirit will do his, “*we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*” (2 Cor 3:18)

Although Christians should continue to pursue their sanctification until the day they die, they will never become perfect, “*Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins*.” (Eccl 7:20) “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us*.” (1 John 1:10) Even our Lord Jesus alluded to the fact that we will always struggle for perfection when he taught us to pray in what is now referred to as the Lord’s prayer… Recall that he told us to ask God to “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*.” (Matt. 6:11) However, we should surely *try to achieve perfection* in our lives. We should not let sin dominate our life and character. After we pass from this life into the next, we will enter into heaven and our task will be complete. We will meet up with others who have also made it to the end of this “marathon race” called life. We will join with these other brothers and sisters and become one of the, “*spirits of just men made perfect.”* (Heb 12:23) We will not receive our glorified bodies until a later date… at the Second Coming of Jesus. “*the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* ***53****For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.*” (1 Cor 15:52-53) At that time, we will have our perfect body for eternity future. More on this topic later.

God, primarily in the person of the Holy Spirit, plays the major role in our work of sanctification. Each individual also has to do his/her best to obey Jesus in this quest as well. An excellent verse that points out the role of both man and God is the following, “***work out your own salvation*** *with fear and trembling;* ***13****for* ***it is God who works in you*** *both to will and to do for His good pleasure*.” (Phil 2:12-13) We should never forget that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. It really should be our goal in life to have the Holy Spirit dominate our will. Certainly, if the Holy Spirit is running our life, we can’t go wrong. However, we will always have the free will to allow our old nature to rear its ugly head and get us off track. Paul spoke about his struggles with this very problematic issue in the early years of his Christian life…“*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.* ***19****For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.* ***20****……..* ***22****For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.* ***23****But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* ***24****O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (Romans 7:18-24) Paul was constantly battling against his old self in the early years after his conversion. The answer to his question of who was going to deliver him from “*this body of death”* came in the next verse, “*I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin*.” (Romans 7:25) As one would expect, his answer was God, through Jesus Christ. Paul recognized that he had to stop trying to live his life by “the flesh.” He was going to need to live it by the Holy Spirit within. “*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.* ***6******For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*.**” (Romans 8:5-6) There are many additional verses in the New Testament that point out the absolute necessity to live by the Holy Spirit… and not by the flesh. For example…

*“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but* ***if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*.**” (Romans 8:13)

*“****Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh****.* ***17****For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.* ***18****But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”* (Gal 5:16-18)

*“reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* ***12****Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.* ***13****And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but* ***present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.14****For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace*.” (Romans 6:11-14)

When controlled by the Holy Spirit, we will have a much better life in so many ways. The Bible tells us that the Spirit will even help us when we pray…*“****the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses****. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but* ***the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us*** *with groanings which cannot be uttered.* ***27****Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God*.” (Romans 8:26-27) When we are successful at being controlled by God’s Spirit, we will experience the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul pointed out to the church in Galatia, “***the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control****. Against such there is no law.* ***24****And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* ***25******If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit*.**”(Gal 5:22-25) Obviously, when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit our lives will be so much better.

How can we do this? I do not believe that there is any easy way to pursue our sanctification. I clearly remember when I used to pray in my younger years and ask that the Holy Spirit would simply take control of my life upon my awakening and then run my life each day – i.e. leave me out of the decision making process. I figured, if I had God controlling my every thought and action, I would never sin and only do good things. I even figured out that I was still using my free will because I was the one praying to ask God to take over. I seemingly had it figured out. Great idea… right? Unfortunately, as Paul must have found out too, God does not allow things to work that way. It is just not that simple. Frankly, I wish it were.

Well, I then went back to the proverbial “drawing board.” I needed to put in my work toward my goal of attaining maximum sanctification in my life here on earth. God would do his part, no doubt about that… but, he wanted me to do my part too. So, what is “my part”… what is our “part?” Common sense and the Bible tell us that we need to do our level best to engulf ourselves in the Lord. I believe that the two most important things that any Christian can do each day are to pray and study the Bible. There is simply no substitute for these two activities as we work to become more like Jesus. We should pray frequently and fervently. We need to communicate with God through prayer and allow him to communicate with us as we meditate. While we pray, we need to listen to that “still small voice” of God. Bible reading and study are also of extreme importance… and they are two different things. I believe both are important. Set aside time to really study certain biblical topics using good commentaries, etc. Also, we should simply read the Bible and let God speak to us in that way as well… and he will do so. Do not forget to thank God for his answers to prayer and his help in getting through each day. I strongly suggest that every Christian set aside time to pray and read/study the Bible each day… and to do both more than once per day… in fact, we should pray throughout the day. Fasting is often referenced in the Bible as an excellent experience to help Christians draw closer to God. Unfortunately, it seems to be done rarely in the Christian world today. All of the aforementioned things can be useful in building our faith and allowing the Holy Spirit to gain better control over our lives. As Paul wrote, “***pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks****; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* ***19Do not quench the Spirit****.”* (1 Thess 5:17-19) “*So then* ***faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God***.” (Romans 10:17) *“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (2 Tim 2:15) God wants us to pray and read his Word. He will bless those who do… and this includes making it easier for us to be led by his Spirit.

There is still more that we can do to help the Holy Spirit gain control over our lives. For one thing, we need to obey Jesus and his commands. As we do this, he will bless us. *“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”* (1 Cor 9:27) All Christians should be involved in their local church. Fellowship and worshipping with other Christians helps us to get closer to God. I almost always feel more controlled by the Holy Spirit after a church service. The writer of Hebrews knew this when he wrote… “*let us consider one another in order to* ***stir up love and good works****,* ***25******not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together****, as is the manner of some, but* ***exhorting one another****, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Heb 10:24-25)

Of course, the more we are able to give our lives over to the control of the Spirit of God, the better our lives will be. We will certainly feel closer to God, and we will experience more of the fruit of the Spirit (listed above).

As we strive for sanctification of our body and souls, God will bless our progress. Although it is very important to be humble about all things, God does recognize that we should have joy when we do make obvious strides in our Christian walk. These gains should spur us onward, and we should see progress as we go from one year to the next, one decade to the next. In fact, if we do not see progress, we need to re-assess our walk with God. For any reading these words, I wish you good and steady progress in your pursuit of your sanctification.

1. **The Doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit (also, being Filled with the Holy Spirit):**

Many books written on the doctrines of the Bible do not cover much on the topic of the baptism in the Holy Spirit… if it is discussed at all. However, since there has been so much attention paid to this aspect of sanctification and worship over the last half century, I thought it would be appropriate to discuss the subject here. There has been an explosion of interest in the work of the Holy Spirit with the dawning of the Pentecostal movement in the 20th century. This really began in the early years of the last century, but gained marked popularity in the 1960s through the 1980s. There are many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches today, especially in the United States.

There are basically two views on what it means for a person to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Pentecostal Christians (and other charismatics) believe that this baptism is meant to be an additional blessing meant for people who are already Christians. Many other denominations, such as Southern Baptists, and most Presbyterians, believe that the only baptism in the Holy Spirit comes with entrance into the family of God… i.e. and this comes with a person’s confession of faith in Jesus at the same time one is gaining salvation. Of course, all reasonable theologians recognize that each Christian is blessed with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit upon conversion. But, is there an additional blessing for those who pursue this special “baptism in the Holy Spirit?” Let us take a look at the reasons that these two opposing points of view have come to exist.

First, it is a fact that millions of Christians believe that they have experienced a baptism in or with the Holy Spirit that came some time *after* they became Christians. They note that their Christian life experience improved markedly after this event, and included a significant increase in their ability to manifest and use spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. Traditional Pentecostal Christians generally state that this “second blessing” was initially manifested (and needed to be manifested) by the gift of “speaking in tongues.” Others in the charismatic movement (those that believe in this “second blessing”) do not believe that the gifts received always include the gift of speaking in tongues.

There are both experiential and biblical reasons for those who hold the viewpoint of this “second blessing.” Please note:

* People who claim this experience almost always are convinced that they have indeed been touched in a special way by the Holy Spirit. They believe that they have been empowered for service and notice an increase in their sanctification. They feel closer to God and have more joy in worship and Bible study. Something real has happened.
* They point to the Bible to show several examples of people apparently receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit significantly after accepting Christ as Savior. Yet, we know that once we become Christians, the Holy Spirit comes to abide within for the remainder of our lives. Hence, their reasoning goes, the baptism spoken of in these Bible passages must be a “second blessing.” For example, Jesus asked his disciples to wait until the day of Pentecost before they left Jerusalem as he was going to gift them with the Holy Spirit. “*And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me;****5****for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’*" (Acts 1:4-5) Yet, these disciples *already were* believers before Pentecost.
* There are a few other occasions mentioned in the book of Acts that demonstrate that people that had become believers did not receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit until a later time… not too much later, but still not instantaneous with conversion. For example*, “Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,* ***15****who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.* ***16****For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* ***17****Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit*.” (Acts 8:14-17)
* Another example may be found in Paul’s ministry, “*Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples* ***2****he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."* ***3****And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."* ***4****Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."* ***5****When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* ***6****And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”* (Acts 19:1-6)

It would appear that these are clear-cut examples of new Christians that did receive a baptism in the Holy Spirit sometime after their initial conversion. So, how do those who state that there is not a second blessing respond? Wayne Gruden, in his excellent book, *Systematic Theology*, has a fine chapter on the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. He points out that the New Testament mentions only seven occasions where people are specifically “baptized in the Holy Spirit”… and then discusses them. Let us take a look:

* In the gospels, Jesus and John speak of two types of baptism… John’s baptism, which is a baptism with water for repentance, and Jesus’ baptism, which is the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The baptism with the Holy Spirit will be required for salvation… Jesus told that to Nicodemus as was explained in a previous section of this book.
* There is mention of the baptism with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost by Jesus (Acts 2) and by Peter (Acts 11). Both refer to the words of Jesus when he told his disciples that he was going to send them this baptism soon, and they should just wait a little while in Jerusalem until it came.
* *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”* (1 Cor 12:13-14) This verse has become a particular point of controversy between these two groups. The Pentecostals believe that this verse does not refer to their concept of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Instead, it is referring to a baptism *done by* the Holy Spirit … not where Jesus is baptizing his followers *in the* Holy Spirit. If this verse really is saying that this baptism has happened to all Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, then it must be saying that all Christians do experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit… and it not an extra blessing as Pentecostal maintain. Both groups refer to the original Greek translations to show why they are correct in their interpretation. I do not want to get into that here. I will note that Grudem concludes after spending a significant amount of time detailing his reasons, that these Corinthian verses do refer to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and it occurs at conversion… not as a special blessing at a later time. Of course, that is just one man’s considered opinion.

His conclusion begs the question as to how to explain the verses that the Pentecostals use to support their position of a second blessing… those listed earlier (those from Acts, 1, 8, and 19). Here is how that issue is explained by those who do not believe in this “second blessing.”

Simply put, the explanation relates to the time period that all of this was taking place. It was the time when God was moving from his Old Covenant treatment of humanity to his New Covenant relationship with believers. The day of Pentecost was the actual day of transition and cannot be used as a benchmark for what will become the norm decades and even centuries down the line. The fact that Jesus had his disciples wait for the “Comforter” until Pentecost in no way means that this wait will become the norm. Obviously, considering what took place on that day (remember the amazing fanfare by which the Holy Spirit arrived), it made sense for God to usher in the Church in that fashion. Three thousand new converts came to Christ that day.

Although the Holy Spirit worked in the lives of believers in the Old Covenant days, he did it sporadically and often with less power. In the New Covenant days, the Holy Spirit takes a much more significant role as he indwells all believers for their entire lives… and helps them toward their sanctification as they allow him to do so. Although the disciples, during the earthly lifetime of Jesus, were given power to witness and even perform some miracles, they did not receive the amazing power of the indwelling Holy Spirit until Pentecost. Then, they all went out to minister and, literally, changed the world for Christ!

However, there are still the experiences in the book of Acts of those new Christians that sometime later received the Holy Spirit that need an explanation. Why do these not speak of a “second blessing?” For one thing, there is no evidence that they had already received the Holy Spirit when they first trusted in Jesus as Savior. That needs to be addressed by those who believe that all Christians receive the Holy Spirit at conversion, yet, do not believe that a second blessing, a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” can occur at a later time. Here is what many maintain:

1. In the case of Philip and the Samaritans (Act 8), it is believed that God simply waited a little while before sending his Spirit to these new Christians. The thought is that God may well have wanted one of his apostles to “do the honors.” Peter and John were sent to see the result of Philip’s evangelism, and were pleased to lay their hands on those new converts. These new Christians then received the Holy Spirit. This was an important occasion in the history of the Church as it was a major step in spreading the gospel to all mankind… even to the Samaritans (with their long history of strife with the Jews).
2. In Acts 19, we see people who had been baptized into the repentance ministry of John… but, not yet heard about the gospel of Jesus… his sacrificial death and resurrection, and their need to trust in him for their eternal life. Therefore, these people received the baptism when Paul taught them about Jesus’ sacrificial atonement and they accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior… i.e. at the time of their true conversion.
3. In other words, those who believe that Christians should not seek for a special additional baptism by the Holy Spirit, simply believe that the New Testament reasons given for this type of special blessing are not sufficient to outweigh the evidence that we are all baptized in the Holy Spirit at the time of our conversion (with a few notable exceptions in the early days of the Church).

However, that definitely does not mean that people who do not believe in a second *baptism* in the Holy Spirit also do not believe in a second *blessing* by the Holy Spirit. Most do. How could one possibly explain all of the fantastic blessings that have come to so many people who have experienced what they generally refer to as the “baptism in the Holy Spirit?” These cannot all be products of the imagination. Many of us just look at this blessing differently… and as follows.

All agree that Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit. As Paul told the Corinthian Christians, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* (1 Cor 3:16) Christians are new creatures in Christ. Of course, just as Paul struggled early in his Christian life, we all struggle with our old self. Recall that it should be our life’s goal to be more like Jesus as we work for our sanctification. Primarily, we should do this by allowing the Holy Spirit to gain total control over our lives. This is often referred to as being filled with the Holy Spirit in the epistles. The Bible speaks of Christians often being filled… and, therefore being re-filled by the Spirit of God. For example:

* *“do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.****18****And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be* ***filled with the Spirit.****”* (Eph 5:17-18) The verb used for filled should be more appropriately translated “be continually being filled.” That is, Christians should work to allow the Holy Spirit control over their lives by continually being filled with the Spirit of God. Of course, this will help us with our sanctification and empower us for service to God.
* Recall that the apostles were all filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Of course, that was the whole point of that day. Yet, frequently thereafter, they received a new filling with Holy Spirit. At a later date, the Bible tells about Peter receiving a new filling… “*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel.”* (Acts 4:8) When Peter and John returned to the company of the other apostles and friends and reported what had happened, the eventually outcome of that meeting was one more filling with the Holy Spirit… “*And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*” (Acts 4:31)
* The point is that there should be a frequent re-filling with the Holy Spirit throughout the lives of Christians.

**Speaking in Tongues:** Let me makeone final note that concerns the issue of speaking in tongues. It often can become a sore point between these two groups. I really do not believe that this should be stressed as a requirement for being baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit. There have been numerous books written on this subject… and this will not be another one of them. I will just make three comments on the subject…

* The Bible says after listing the many gifts of the Holy Spirit, “*But one and the same Spirit works all these things,* ***distributing to each one individually as He wills****.”*  (1 Cor 12:11) Different people get different gifts.
* Paul also said, “*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.* ***9****For we know in part and we prophesy in part.* ***10****But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”* (1 Cor 13:8-10) It is conceivable, that certain gifts of the Holy Spirit have passed away… many people do believe that we do not see them manifest as often as in the apostolic period… even if they still do exist.
* I have known a great many superb Christians who do claim to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Maybe they have been; I do not know for sure. Maybe this is a second blessing on top of the original indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Yet, some of these people do not speak in tongues. So, even if one does believe in this second blessing, I do believe that the preponderance of evidence is that not everyone will receive the gift of tongues. Why should that be the only gift that everyone receives, anyway?

**Conclusion**: So, what is the point? All Christians are given the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet, the Holy Spirit can play a large role in the life of a Christian or a small role. It is really up to each person. The key is to work diligently to turn over our lives each day to the control of the Spirit of God. This is done through prayer, Bible reading and study, godly meditation, using our spiritual gifts for the Church, worship, and moral living. Pentecostals and other charismatics believe it important to prepare their life in such a way that they can experience the second blessing of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Others, such as Southern Baptists and most Presbyterians, believe that a person should prepare their life in such a way that they can experience more of a continual filling (or re-filling) with the Holy Spirit… and keep doing so throughout their lifetime. Both of these groups of Christians experience blessings directly related to the Holy Spirit’s work in their lives. Both groups will notice an increase in manifestation of the spiritual gifts in their lives when they are blessed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is blessing those who believe in a second blessing and those who believe in a refilling with the Holy Spirit after a one-time baptism at the onset of their Christian walk. God only knows for sure who is technically correct… but, God honors both with a Spirit-filled life.

1. **Doctrine of Prayer:**

We have just completed examining in some detail God’s plan of salvation for mankind. God’s great love and mercy led him to save all those who will place their faith in his Son, Jesus, and his finished work on the cross. Although we are saved purely though the grace of God, it truly is our Christian duty to pursue sanctification once we have committed our life to Jesus. The more we are able to cede control of our daily lives to the Holy Spirit, the closer will our walk be with God. It should be the goal of every Christian to become more like Jesus each day. I suggest that there are at least three things that we should do daily to accomplish this goal:

1. Obey Jesus in all that we do. In other words, live a moral and ethical life that will make our Lord proud.
2. Study the Bible with vigor. In other words, really try to dig deeply into God’s Word. Allow God to speak to you through his “Living Word.”
3. Pray to God. Do this throughout each day and set time aside to pray more intensely at some point(s) during the day.

This last suggestion above (i.e. prayer) will be the subject of the remainder of this section… let us take a closer look at the *Doctrine of Prayer*.

Prayer is our opportunity to come to God and talk to him about all of our hopes, dreams, concerns, worries, etc. It is our chance to sit down with our all-loving, omnipotent Father and have a deep heart-to-heart talk. We can ask him to give us things that we need, we can ask for his help through difficult times, we should confess our sins to God and ask his forgiveness and help to keep from repeating those same sins, we should thank him for recent answers to prayer, we should worship him during our prayer time, and we should allow God time to communicate with us… via his *“still, small voice.”* (1 Kings 19:12)

God, of course, knows what we are going to say during our prayers. “For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” (Matt 6:8) So, why should we pray? Prayer allows us to open an important line of communication with God… you see, he can respond to our prayers in mysterious ways. Not only that, when we pray, we demonstrate our trust and show our faith in God that he will answer our prayers. Also, we can take the time to thank God for previous gifts and praise and worship him during our prayer. These things require us to actually pray. God will honor those who take the time to come to him in this manner. It is interesting to note that Jesus taught his disciples (and us) to pray right after telling them that God already knew what they would say in their prayer (noted above). He then proceeded to teach them how to pray while saying what has come to be known as the Lord’s Prayer.

*“Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.* ***10****Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* ***11****Give us this day our daily bread.* ***12****And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* ***13****And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”* (Matt 6:9-13)

It is a good idea to carefully study our Lord’s Prayer to see those items he believed were appropriate to include in our own prayers. This is a wonderful model prayer. I won’t take the time to go through each phrase of this prayer… but, I recommend that everyone do this. For example, we should recognize the Lord for who he is when we go to him each day (hopefully, more than once per day). We should ask him to help us with our daily needs – remember that Jesus wants us to concentrate on each day and not worry about tomorrow *(“do not worry about tomorrow*, *for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble”).* (Matt 6:34) We should always express our sorrow and repentance for past sins – and let him know that we forgive those who have sinned against us (and, in fact, forgive these people). I will let the reader continue with their own study of this great prayer given to us from our Lord.

We can show our love of God through the time we spend in prayer and through the content of those prayers. God loves us, and he wants us to reciprocate that love. If we truly love God, it would make sense that we would want to spend time talking to him. We can also use a portion of our prayer time to pray for the advancement of the Kingdom of God… and to pray for the soon return of Jesus.

I know that many people wonder about the effectiveness of prayer. I have done so. I know that it is definitely appropriate to pray… but, I have wondered how much good that it does. As the years have gone by, I have come to the realization that prayer is very important for reasons that I will mention below… but, of course, we do not always have our prayers answered in the way that we would want… but, even our Lord Jesus did not get everything that he initially asked for from his Father. Let me begin by addressing the topic of the effectiveness of prayer… does it change the course of human events?

**The Effectiveness of Prayer**: God tells us to ask for what we want when we come to him in prayer. *“you do not have because you do not ask.”* (James 4:2) *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.* ***8****For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”.* (Matt 7:7-8) There seems to be no doubt about the fact that God wants us to ask for our needs and that he will grant us those requests. But, is that true? Yes and no. The fact is that there are various other factors that do come into play as far as whether God will grant us our requests. As is always the case, we cannot simply take one or two verses in the Bible out of the context of the entire Word of God. So what are those things that may interfere with God granting our request?

* **Jesus is the mediator for Christians** as they come to God in prayer. In other words, God has only promised to answer the prayers of his children… i.e. Christians. It is true that God does hear the prayers of non-believers and, at times, he does answer their prayers. But, there obviously is a completely different relationship between a non-believer and God and those that God recognizes as co-heirs with Christ… Christians. So, if we want our prayers to mean so much more, we must be followers of Christ. We are now able to enter into the Holy of Holies because Christ has become our mediator. We now have direct access to speak to God… as a son or a daughter to his/her Father.
* A Christian’s **prayers may well be stymied by** **unconfessed sin** in his life. Our Lord’s Prayer pointed out how we need to confess our sin to God when we come to him in prayer and ask for his forgiveness. We also need to forgive others who have sinned against us… not always an easy task. However, God wants us to do it. *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* ***15****But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* (Matt 6:14-15) If we have unconfessed sin in our life, or if we are holding a grudge against another, we likely will experience less effectiveness in our prayer life. Let me be clear that our eternal destiny is not in doubt, but God’s answer to our prayer requests might be.
* **Obedience** to God is very important. If we do not obey God, he is definitely less likely to grant us our prayer requests. This is noted often throughout the Bible. For example: *“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.* ***22****And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”* (1 John 3:21-22)

*“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel…..that your prayers may not be hindered.”* (1 Peter 3:7)

*“If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”* (Psalms 66:18)

*“The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.”* (Prov 15:29)

*“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.”* (Psalms 34:15)

* **Praying in Jesus name***- “whatever* *you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* ***14****If you ask anything in My name, I will do.”* (John 14:13-14) What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus? Although it is appropriate to call attention to the fact that one is praying in the name of Jesus by adding this expression in a prayer, it is important to realize that this phrase is not a magical phrase. Actually, what Jesus is telling us is that we should come to God in prayer because, as Christians, we are able to do so on his authority… and because of his merits. This relates back to the fact that Jesus is our mediator. Again, it points also to the fact that Christians will have much greater access to God in every way than the non-Christian… including answer to prayer.
* Pray with **humility**: The next time that the reader studies the gospels, take note of the importance that Jesus places on humility. He really does not like pride… to say the least. When we come to him in prayer, we need to demonstrate our humility. We should always be humble, by the way. *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*” (James 4:10) *"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.* ***11****The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.* ***12****I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'* ***13****And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'* ***14****I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* (Luke 18:10-14)
* **Pray with Faith**: *“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.* (Mark 11:24) Note how Jesus tells us that if we come to God in prayer with confidence, our prayer requests will be granted. Now, that does create somewhat of a quandary, since experience shows most people that not all of their prayer requests will be granted exactly as they requested. Be that as it may, it is still much better to come to God in prayer with faith, than doubting. Jesus tells us that. James also notes the importance of faith in prayer… “let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” (James 1:6) Yet, we cannot simply conjure up faith. So, how do Christians gain faith as they work toward their sanctification? For one thing, we need to follow biblical advice on that subject… *“Faith comes through hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* (Romans 10:17) In other words, we need to study the scriptures often and come often to God in prayer. The more time we spend in prayer and in the Word, the more we will see God work in our lives and the more faith we will receive. God, ultimately, is the one who gives us our faith. But, we can do those things (just noted) that cause God to grant us more faith. I often recall the interchange between Jesus and the father of the demon possessed boy. *“if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."* ***23****Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."* ***24****Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "****Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*** (Mark 9:22-24) That man had faith in Jesus – he knew that Christ had great power. Yet, he also wanted more faith. So, he did what we should do in our prayers… ask for more faith as well. As time goes by in our lives, if we continue to study, obey, and pray, God will give us more faith. In the meantime, we should pray and believe to the best of our abilities. *“Trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on your own understanding, acknowledge him in all your ways and he shall direct your paths.”*  (Prov. 3:5-6)
* **Praying Earnestly and with Persistence**: There are many places in the Bible where God shows us that he wants us to pray with supplication and persistence. Apparently, sometimes God wants us to prove to him just how much something means to us. Examples of this abound in the Old and New Testaments. Moses spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai while praying for the Israelites. Jacob actually battled with Jesus in earnest while asking for God’s blessing. “Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. **25** Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. **26** And He said, "Let go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" **27** So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." **28** And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Gen 32:24-28) Jesus tells a parable with a similar message for us… “there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.' **4** And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, **5** yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' " **6** Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. **7** And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? **8** I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. (Luke 18:3-8) There are more parables and examples of the need for earnest and persistent prayer on some occasions. Let us remember to continually pray for those needs most dear to us… and never give up. That is the point of these parables and biblical examples.
* **Praying in Private**: Many times in the Bible we read of great men of God retreating to a private room or place to commune with God. For example, Daniel prayed three times each day in his room… *“in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.”* (Dan 6:10) Jesus often would go off by himself to pray… *“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.”* (Luke 5:16) Jesus told us *“when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”* (Matt 6:6) Of course, it is not always necessary or appropriate to pray alone and in private, but often it is a good idea to attain better conditions for communion with God.
* **Fasting with Prayer**: As I have intermittently mentioned throughout this treatise, fasting is a form of worship and supplication before God that has pretty much been lost. Yet, there is no reason that fasting should be ignored. Not infrequently, when faced with a particularly difficult problem, people in the Bible would fast and pray. For example, before the church sent Barnabas and Paul off on their first missionary journey, they fasted and prayed… *“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* ***3****Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”* (Acts 13:2-3) There are many other examples that could be listed as well (Joel 2:12, Acts 14:23, Daniel 9:3, etc.)
* **Praying according to God’s Will:**  *“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that* ***if we ask anything according to His will****, He hears us.* ***15****And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask,* ***we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him****.”* (1 John 5:14-15) God will grant us the requests that we make in our prayers if they align with his will for our lives, those of others, and the world. Even Jesus was subject to this qualification. For example, *"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."* (Matt 26:39) Jesus prayed that God might find another way to accomplish the atonement. If it had been possible, he did not want to have to go through what that next day held in store for him. Yet, as we see, Jesus immediately added that if there were no other way, he was ready to do God’s will… and he certainly did.

Basically, the situation with prayer is that when we pray, God will grant us our requests if they align with his overall providential plan (His will) for this world (more about God’s providence a little later). The more obedient we have been, the greater our faith, the more persistent we are, the more humility we show, the more likely that God will grant us our requests. However, there are some requests that cannot be granted because doing so would interfere with God’s overall plan. For example, essentially every Christian prays for the health of his or her parents… if God always granted cures for the diseases afflicting our loved ones, few Christians would ever die and pass on into heaven. This is not God’s plan for the world. Hence, he cannot always affect a cure through prayer for our loved ones. Sometimes God will grant us a cure… but, we cannot expect him to do so always.

Sometimes God may not grant our prayer request right away in order to bring to us a greater blessing down the line. There are many instances in the Bible where God puts up roadblocks for his followers in order to lead them to a better place… a place that he wanted them to be… a better place. He did this with Joseph, Paul, and many others. That is true today as well. We may not realize that God is doing that until many years later. We must place our trust in him if we are to have peace and happiness in this life. As I mentioned before, one of my favorite songs speaks to this… “*Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*” We should pray and expect God to honor our requests, but understand that he may have other plans in mind at times… eventually, all things will work out for our good in every case. “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

* **Unanswered Prayer**: Every reasonable Christian recognizes that God does not give us positive answers to all of our requests. We have just covered many things that we as Christians can do to pray with more power and faith… and we should do these things. Even so, there will still be prayers that will not result in God granting us what we request. We must remember that God has an overarching plan for this universe and for every person in it. Sometimes, our prayer requests may not align with these plans. Sometimes God simply is delaying his action… even by decades. Sometimes, the fact that we live in a fallen world causes terrible things to happen that will not be rectified until we all reach heaven. However, it is critically important that we learn the lesson that Job finally learned after incessantly begging God for answers as to the reasons for his suffering… and not receiving any reply. Job was terribly upset and ready to give up… he wished that he had never been born… he wished that God would let him die. Finally, God did speak to Job… and to us. God gave Job and you and me an answer as to why sometimes bad things happen to good people and why some prayers seemingly go unanswered. That answer proved very satisfactory to Job… and, I will say, to me as well. Yet, it was an unusual reply. Let me tell you the gist of God’s reply now…

In summary, chapters 40 and 41 of Job tell us that the God that can create and sustain the great animals (and everything else for that matter) is clearly far and away superior to any man. To attempt to question any of His actions, therefore, is absurd. But, can we be sure that this all-powerful God has our best interests at heart? What has God done to earn our faith and trust? Think about Jesus for your answer.

Is it ludicrous to question God’s actions? You bet! God has indeed demonstrated his immense love for his children by sending Jesus to die on the cross for all mankind. He also has absolutely demonstrated his overwhelming power and intellect. We can put these things together and know for sure that God is doing what is right and best for the world and for us. We may not be able to understand all of his actions… in fact, it is very doubtful that any human will ever understand… this side of heaven. However, with the knowledge we have of our heavenly Father’s great love for us, we should trust him to do what is best.

When certain things during our life on earth are too difficult for us to clearly comprehend, it is enough for the Christian who really understands the love and power of God, to place their trust in Him to see them through to the end. After that encounter with God, Job said that his “eyes have seen you [i.e. God]”. Job was then able to see the entire situation through the eyes of faith. God wants and loves for His children to demonstrate their faith. Frequently, Jesus commended people for their demonstrations of faith (see Matt 9:2,22,29; Mark 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:9; 7:50; 8:48; 18:42). Job was finally able to use his faith as he told God that, although he still did not know what was going on with him and his recent horrific physical and family problems, he did recognize that God had everything under control, and he was perfectly fine with that knowledge.

When we puzzle over life’s unanswered questions and unanswered prayers, let us use our faith in God to see us through. As Paul put it in the book of Romans, it makes no sense for the clay to question the “Potter”. Man questioning an all-loving God is just as absurd. Instead, let us re-orient our minds, and let all of our questions disappear as we hand over all of our questions, doubts and fears to God. We know for certain that God loves us considering all that he has done and sacrificed for us. I believe that God does not answer all of our questions because he wants us to exercise our faith in him. As noted in the above paragraph, God demonstrates repeatedly in the Bible that He wants His children to exercise their faith in Him. The Bible states that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6). Although God was not willing to answer Job’s specific questions, He did intervene and remind Job of who each of them were. He wanted Job to take the time to think! Job, to his credit, carefully considered this God-given information, and finally had a wonderful, life-changing epiphany. He realized that if he really did believe that God was omnipotent, omniscient, and all-loving, it only made sense that he should be willing to give literally every circumstance in life over to God in complete faith and trust. If he were not willing to do this, then he really did not believe those things about God. Fortunately, Job realized that he truly did believe these things about God. God loved him with an infinite love and was certainly not only able, but also totally willing, to make sure that Job would have a life worthy of a child of God… a life that would ultimately be a life of peace and joy and hope. God’s providential care was so powerful that He could create those situations that would cause “all things to work together for [Job’s] good” (paraphrase of Romans 8:28) This new-found trust and faith brought Job into a beautifully trusting relationship with his Creator. We should do the same as Job. Put all of your faith and trust in God.

**God’s Word and God’s People**

1. **Scripture - Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy:**

The Bible makes certain important claims concerning its contents.

“*All* ***Scripture is given by inspiration of God,*** *and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,* ***17****that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2 Tim 3:16-17)

*“no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,* ***21****for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”* (2 Peter 1:20-21)

There are many places in the Old Testament and the New Testament that teach that God spoke through his prophets. For example:

*“Then you shall say to Pharaoh,* ***Thus says the Lord****: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me.’”* (Ex 4:22-23) The expression, “Thus says the Lord” appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament. Obviously, the words that follow are *directly* from God.

David said, *"****The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me****, and His word was on my tongue.”* (2 Sam 23:2)

Zechariah wrote that the Israelites failed to abide by the Word of the Lord that they had received from God’s prophets… “*Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had* ***sent by His Spirit through the former prophets****.”*(Zech 7:12)

Jesus quotes repeatedly from the Old Testament to thwart Satan’s attempts to tempt him to sin and then adds, "It is written, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'”* (Matt 4:4) Jesus is telling the reader with this comment that the Old Testament is the Word of God.

*“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”* (Heb 1:1-2)

*“our beloved brother Paul, according to* ***the wisdom given to him****, has written to you,* ***16****as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”* (2 Peter 3:15-16) Peter tells his readers that Paul’s epistles are to be considered inspired scripture.

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--things which must shortly take place.”* (Rev 1:1) In this first verse of The Revelation of Jesus Christ, John makes us aware that all that he will write down will come from the Lord.

Paul makes it very clear in his letter to the Galatians that the Bible is inspired by God… *“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.* ***12****For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but* ***it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.****”* (Gal 1:11-12)

Given the words from the Bible above, and many others like them, we can be sure that the Bible is the actual Word of God. Historically and doctrinally, the Bible is said to be the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. Let us break these three words down:

* The Bible is **inspired** by God: As Paul wrote to Timothy, “*all scripture is given by inspiration of God.*” We see in this verse that every word in the Bible comes from God, ultimately. If God did not want something in his Word, he would make sure that it did not appear. As was noted earlier, Jesus taught that every word in the Bible was coming from God when he said, "It is written, *'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* (Matt 4:4) So, how does God accomplish this? God ***inspired*** dozens of men to write the words of the Bible over a period longer than one thousand years. He did this primarily through the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. His Spirit worked through this varied group of men to call to their attention the very words to write down in the original books of the Bible. No errors were made while doing this. The Holy Spirit allowed for each human writer to write in their own style, but did make sure that the final product was correct and exactly what God wanted it to be… in the original manuscripts. Sometimes this is referred to as the plenary-verbal inspiration of the Bible. Simply put, this means that the Bible is *completely* inspired by God (every aspect of the Word is inspired by God). The Bible is now the final authority in matters of faith and a believer’s work toward sanctification. As Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” (Matt 24:35)

It is appropriate to point out that God did accomplish the task of inspiring the writers of the Bible in a variety of ways. For example, he sometimes spoke to them directly (Rev. 2:1), he sent them dreams and visions (Dan. 7), visitations from angels (Dan 9, Luke 1), and also communicated to them in a variety of other ways (“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets.” (Heb 1:1)) The important point is that God made sure that the selected human writers got his message exactly right… which brings us to the next point…

* The Bible is the **inerrant** Word of God: Scripture, in the original manuscripts, does not affirm anything contrary to fact. The Bible is without error. This tenant can be found in many verses throughout the scriptures. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “*all scripture is God-breathed.”* Naturally, this implies inerrancy. Many other verses have already been noted above that tell us that the Bible is the Word of God. Hence, it cannot have errors in it since God is perfect and does not make mistakes (remember that God is omniscient). The Bible affirms the obvious as well… *“it is impossible for God to lie.*” (Heb 6:18) Jesus said when speaking of his Father, “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) The Psalmist confirmed truth… “*The entirety of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever*.” (Psalms 119:160)
* The Bible is the **infallible** Word of God: Infallible is a word that describes the fact that the Bible is God’s Holy Word; it cannot fail and it cannot be broken. Jesus told us that *“the Scripture cannot be broken*.” (John 10:35) This word means more than the fact that the Bible is without errors concerning factual matters. The Bible presents to the reader the promises of God and the commands of God. It will accomplish the eternal plans of God. “*My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”* (Isaiah 55:11) Paul points to the Bible as being God’s divinely spoken Word that had been entrusted to his Jewish ancestors, *“to them were committed the oracles of God.”* (Romans 3:2) The point is that the Bible is much more than a mistake free book… it is the divine Word of a Holy God. It will accomplish exactly what God desires. As he says, “It shall not return to Me void.”

**Additional Characteristics of the Bible**: The Bible has certain other characteristics besides the three mentioned above. It is *necessary*, *sufficient*, *indestructible*, and *indefatigable*. It is necessary because it is used all over the world to teach people what they need to know about God and Jesus. It is also needed to teach Christians how to pursue their sanctification. It is also sufficient to accomplish these important tasks. I should add that God does reveal himself through the “general revelation” of nature and the moral laws he implants in the souls of all humans. However, the “special revelation” of his Bible gives markedly more information about God and his works. The Bible is timeless and will always be the most important book in the world. It will never be destroyed. Many have tried to destroy all copies of the Bible down through the centuries… God will not ever let that happen. In fact, reading about the history concerning those who have tried to banish the Bible forever is an interesting thing to do… it is quite illuminating.

**Illumination**: The Holy Spirit will shed divine light on the seeking reader of the Bible. This is very important as the Bible tells us that without the proper illumination the words of the Bible will not be appreciated for what they really are… the Word of God. For instance, “*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (1 Cor 2:14) “even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, **4** whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe.” (2 Cor 4:3-4)

The good news is that God will illuminate his Word to those seeking him… *“it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* (2 Cor 4:6) God will honor the seeker of truth… those who seek him. *“you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”* (Deut 4:29) *“without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”* (Heb 11:6) For those who seek after Jesus, remember his wonderful words, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”* (John 14:6) If a person is truly looking to find God, he/she will find him.

**Conclusion**: Norman Geisler wrote a good definition of God’s Word that combines the fact that it is inspired, inerrant and infallible. He wrote, “The **inspiration** of Scripture is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit who, through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors, invested the very words of the original books of Holy Scripture, alone and in their entirety, as the very Word of God **without error** in all that they teach (including history and science) and is therefore the **infallible** rule and final authority for the faith and practice of all believers.” I believe that Geisler’s quote sums up the amazing power and importance of the Bible.

The claim that Scripture is absolute truth and inerrant comes from the Bible itself. The God of the Bible makes that claim as we have noted in the above discussion. So, why should we believe that claim? If we have evidence to believe that the God of the Bible is who he says he is, and that his Son is really the Son of God and rose from the dead, then we surely have reason to believe their words. Jesus assured us that the entire Bible is the Word of God… that should certainly be enough for his followers. If we cannot trust the entire Bible, why should we believe anything that it says… anything? Some people like to pick and choose what they will accept as truly being words from God (in the Bible). What makes these people think that they are capable of being God’s editors? That surely is the height of hubris. The simple fact is that we will not be able to understand everything that happens to us and others during our life here on earth. Certainly, Job did not understand what was happening to him. Elijah was puzzled at times as well. So was David… and Moses. Many prophets of God had questions about the things that were happening to them or their loved ones. Finally they learned that they were not supposed to understand everything at this time, but instead were supposed to trust that God knew what he was doing and would make sure that *“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28) The Bible wants us to take seriously the following, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;* ***6****In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* (Prov 3:5-6) Do your best to do that at all times.

God has provided us with the Bible as his “Living Word.” It is one of his two main mechanisms of communication with his children (prayer being the other). Importantly, God tells us that his Word is alive and powerful. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* (Heb 4:12) When we read and study the Bible, God is speaking to us. Depending on our situation, he may use the same passage in the Bible to communicate a different truth or message. He may well use his providential care to lead us to read from a particular portion of the Bible at a particular time in our life. Do not forget, God is omnipotent, and if we are doing our best to learn from him, he will certainly do his part… usually, through his glorious Word. Of course, we must do our part… we must take time to study the Bible.

1. **Scripture – Method of Interpretation Covenant Theology vs. Dispensationalism:**

**Introduction:** Before proceeding with a discussion of the Church and of end-times prophecy, it is important to consider the varying methods of biblical interpretation that conscientious students of the Bible have employed over the centuries. Just how the individual views the content of the Bible will make an enormous difference on how that person interprets certain portions of it, including its prophetic words. As already mentioned, most conservative theologians view the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. They believe that God knew exactly what he wanted to reveal to humanity and did so through his prophets via the written Word. They do not believe that there are any errors in the original manuscripts… and only a few insignificant errors in the translations that are available to read and study today. Obviously, God has the power to protect his Word and the belief is that he did so throughout the ages. Even given that most of conservative scholars take this same view, there still is a difference of opinion on just how to interpret the Scriptures. So, even though this topic is not actually a doctrine of the Bible, it is very important to understand how different theologians interpret the Word if we are to properly understand many of the doctrines presented in this book.

There are two basic ways that the Bible has been interpreted down through the ages: literally and allegorically. Vastly different conceptions of the Israel and end-time events result, depending on which of these methods is used. The basic points of view concerning these two are as follows:

* **Literal Interpretation**: Those people who interpret the Bible *literally*, believe that the reader should approach it in the same manner that he/she would interpret any other work of non-fiction. This is also called the *grammatical-historical* method of interpretation. Simply put, those who take this approach, take the words of the Bible to mean what they actually say. However, when it becomes obvious that a word or phrase is meant to be taken as a metaphor or a ‘figure of speech,’ it should be interpreted in that way. This will not discount the passage as having been interpreted via the literal method. For example, if a man were to say that “I am so hungry, I could eat a horse” after missing a few meals, it really only means that he is very, very hungry. Along with understanding typical figures of speech, one must interpret the meaning of Scripture using normal historical and cultural data from the biblical times from which it originated. Also, and very importantly, the reader should take advantage of passages in one area of the Bible to help in interpreting metaphorical verses that also appear in other areas**.** God uses numbers, colors, celestial bodies, metals, trees, animals, common objects, and even parts of the body to represent certain things in a metaphorical fashion. A careful study of the entire Bible allows a person to better understand the reasons why God may be using certain of these words to describe a particular situation. In almost every case when these words are used, it is quite obvious that they are to be understood metaphorically. In most of these cases, God even gives the interpretation of these metaphors just a little later in the same paragraph.

Simply put, the literal method of interpretation is the most straightforward method. It may be arguable whether this is the best method to use for interpreting end-time prophecies, however, this method certainly is the best one to minimize speculation and subjective interpretation.

It is worthwhile, again, to point out that hundreds of Old and New Testament prophetic passages have already been fulfilled – and they have all been fulfilled in the literal manner just described. For example, none of the prophecies concerning Jesus were seen to come true in some mystical, allegorical way. No, they all came true literally. For these reasons, the *literal* method of interpretation is the one that I believe is the appropriate method to use when studying the end-times prophetic Word of God. On the other hand, another approach gained popularity a few hundred years after Pentecost. That is now referred to as the *allegorical* approach.

* **Allegorical Interpretation:** This method is essentially the opposite of the literal approach. The history behind this technique of interpretation is interesting. Two very important “Church Fathers”, Origen (AD 185-254) and Augustine (AD 354-430), championed this approach to prophecy. Both of these well-known theologians and philosophers were greatly influenced by their classical Greek education. The Greeks generally believed that material and physical things (i.e. matter of any sort, even to include the human body) was evil. Origen was considered the father of the allegorical approach to biblical interpretation. He had a great desire to find hidden meanings in God’s Word… he simply assumed that these spiritual, mystical meanings were there and that they were much more important than the obvious and plain meaning of the words. Some of his interpretations were so far from the norm that he was accused of heresy by many of the main-line Christians of those early centuries.

Augustine followed two hundred years later and continued this approach to the study of the Bible. He also was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy. On the other hand, he was more conservative in his views toward the Bible and his views were much more accepted by the Church. In fact, he is considered the individual who had the greatest impact on the Roman Catholic Church and its theology. He believed that there were several layers of mystical interpretations that could be gleaned from virtually every verse of the Bible. Soon after the life of Augustine, the entire world entered into the Dark Ages. It became virtually impossible for anyone to have access to the Word of God. The Bible was only available in Latin and was not, in fact, available to many. Therefore, Augustine’s influence dominated the Church for most of the next 1000 years. The book of *The Revelation* was looked upon as a symbolic view of the spiritual warfare between good and evil. It was certainly not taken as a serious analysis of end-time events. It was not until the reformation that Catholic views on the Bible were even contested (e.g. by Martin Luther). Interest in the study of prophecy lagged behind. It took until the early part of the 19th century before scholars interested in prophecy began to re-think this allegorical approach and return to the literal method of interpretation.

There are many who still choose to view the Bible in this allegorical fashion today. The major difficulty with that approach is that objectivity may well be lost. One individual’s conception of the symbolism behind a verse or series of verses may well be totally different than another person’s… who is to say which one is correct? As will be shown, this method of interpretation leads to a far different view of many of the plain words of scripture than does the literal method.

**Biblical Systems of Theology:**

We have just discussed, briefly, the two main methods of interpreting biblical passages. Importantly, there are also differing methods that have been used to attempt to better understand the overall manner of just how God has dealt with his Creation since the beginning of time. These methods of interpretation are typically referred to as *systems of theology*. The two main systems that are prominent in Christianity today are ***covenant theology*** and ***dispensational theology.*** These varying methods of looking at the inter-relationship between God and man have surprisingly influenced the study of Israel and eschatology (study of the end-times). Depending on which system is used to interpret the major eschatological books in the Bible, very different views of the end-times will result… including the future fate of Israel. Let us now gain an understanding of these two theological systems:

**Covenant Theology:**

Covenant Theology is a system that believes that God has formed essentially three different covenants with mankind (actually, there are some covenant theologians who only adhere to the last two *covenants* mentioned below). The concept behind it is that the entire Holy Bible can be viewed as being the Word of God brought to humanity in the nature of these three covenants between God and man. In eternity past, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit made a covenant whereupon God the Son (Jesus) agreed to, one day in the distant future, give his life as a ransom for all those who would turn to him as Savior… the *elect* of God. This was the first covenant… this was not between God and man, but a covenant between the members of the Holy Trinity.

This **first covenant** is called the *covenant of redemption*. This involves the *harmony* and *unity* of purpose of the Trinity from eternity past. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit agreed about bringing forth the works of redemption. This involves all aspects of redemption (e.g. Jesus’ sacrificial death, the Holy Spirit’s work to help Christians in their pursuit of sanctification, etc.). This covenant has been in existence since eternity past.

The **second covenant** is the one that God initially made with Adam (often called the *covenant of works*). God promised life if Adam and his progeny were totally obedient to him, but death would ensue if Adam disobeyed (i.e. sinned). Adam, of course, sinned. Since the destiny of Adam and Eve and their progeny was to be determined by their behavior, i.e. by their works, this second covenant is called the *covenant of works*. If a person does good works they would gain eternal life; if not, then that person would die and face an eternity in hell. It’s that simple. Initially, the terms of the relationship with God were set up with respect to the obedience or disobedience to God’s Law. As everyone knows, Adam and Eve violated the covenant of works, bringing upon themselves and all their descendants the judgment of God because the covenant of works had been violated. Thus, death entered into the human race and, under this covenant, all mankind was doomed to die and be separated from God.

God, however, in his infinite mercy, then offered a wonderful **third covenant**, the *covenant of grace.* This was given to Abraham, Moses, and David, and continued to be passed all the way down the line. With this third covenant, God provided redemption for his people through an incredibly gracious and loving gift. God condescended to send his only Son to earth as the perfect ransom for the elect. Jesus Christ is the mediator of this covenant. He is the final and sufficient sacrifice required by God for the salvation of those who have placed their faith in him. This last covenant is actually directly related to the first covenant… it is just its final fulfillment. As Paul said in his letter to the Romans, all of the elect, regardless of the time in which they live, are saved by faith, and faith alone. In covenant theology, the belief is that the people in the Old Testament looked *forward* to the Messiah “of promise” to save them. In some inscrutable way, God gave each saved Old Testament saint at least some measure of knowledge of the coming Savior. Their faith in the coming Messiah was what provided their eternal salvation.

The undergirding principal of covenant theology is that God’s central purpose is to provide salvation to his elect. This has been the plan of the Holy Trinity from eternity past. As it turned out, there would be only one way that salvation could be obtained. People can only be saved by God’s grace. There is no other way. Although it is true that no one is saved by virtue of any of their own merit or works, everyone truly is still saved by works… the perfect works of the Lord Jesus Christ!

The intriguing point of this way of looking at God’s plan for the ages is that all of the various covenants that God has made with Israel and the Church (e.g. Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, and the New Covenant) are looked at as being out-workings of either the covenant of *works* or *grace*. The *covenant of works* really only applied to Adam. Once he sinned, God instituted his *covenant of grace*. All of the promises that God made from Abraham to Moses to David and all the way to the New Covenant are all aspects of this covenant of grace. Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all of these intermediate covenants of grace. Basically, everything in the Old Testament that happened after the “fall” was one aspect of this merciful covenant of grace. Therefore, this system of theology effectively simplifies biblical interpretation into two covenants… *works* and *grace*.

Since covenant theologians view virtually the entire Bible as the working out of the covenant of God’s grace (at least since the fall of Adam), this greatly affects the way they view certain aspects of the Bible and its prophecy. Most covenant theologians have adopted the following views:

* There were many distinct and varied promises that God made to Abraham, Moses, David, Israel, and the Church in various biblical covenants. Covenant Theology attempts to make all of these distinct covenants of God as simply a progressive covenant of grace… that is, just one covenant. Not only that, but the Church generally is looked upon as an extension of Israel in this system of theology. Therefore, when the nation and people of Israel reject God, the Church inherits their promises.
* Covenant Theology rightly ***stresses the centrality of Jesus Christ and God’s grace in our salvation.*** Dispensationalists (whose views will be discussed shortly) suggest that many other important doctrines of the Bible are not dealt with properly when this method of interpretation is used. The concern is that by melding Israel, the Church and the many different covenants of the Bible, it becomes much more difficult to understand the varying relationships that God has had, and will have, in the future with his people. It is the dispensationalist view that nowhere in the Scriptures does God *explicitly* state that he has ceded all of his promises to Israel (his “chosen people”) to his Bride, the Church. Each of these entities has had different relationships with God in the past, and many believe that they will have different future relationships. Yet, this is not what is typically taught in Covenant Theology.
* Covenant Theology combines the historical-grammatical method of Scripture interpretation with the allegorical method when dealing with prophecy. Covenant theologians generally use the literal approach with most of the Scripture, but must interpret many of the promises God made to Israel in a spiritual sense. For example, it applies their promises to the Church as the “spiritual Israel” of this age. In this view, the nation of Israel forfeited God’s promises to them after their disobedience, especially after their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah and Son of God.

It is worthwhile to take at least a brief look at the history of this system of theology. As it turns out, Covenant Theology is of fairly recent origin. Most books on this topic say that this system came into being around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although St. Augustine taught the outlines of what would become central elements in classic Reformed theology (including the covenant of works and the covenant of grace), Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531) may have been the first to develop a *detailed covenant theology* concept including the doctrine of the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. In fact, the great Reformed theologian Amandus Polanus considered Oecolampadius the first Reformed covenant theologian. (<http://clark.wscal.edu/briefhistorycovtheol.php>) Probably the two most important early contributors to its development as a *system of theology* were Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) and Herman Witsius (1636-1708). Many others contributed their ideas over the succeeding centuries as Covenant Theology developed into the system that it has become today. Although it was not even mentioned by the early leaders of the Reformation, such as Luther and Calvin, it soon became the system most commonly used by Reformed Churches to understand the Bible. Today, many people equate Reformed Theology to Covenant Theology… although they are not really the same thing. Simply put, Reformed Theology is that belief system that grew out of the Reformation. Often this product of the Reformation is said to be synonymous to Calvinism, which itself is identified by the “five points of Calvinism” (total depravity of man, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints). The point here is that Covenant Theology is not the same thing as Reformed Theology, but certainly is the system of understanding the Bible that is most often identified with it. Now let us take a look at a completely different system of theology, one that has become very popular among the preachers and teachers of the vast majority of evangelical churches of the past fifty years – dispensationalism.

**Dispensationalism:**

Dispensationalism is a relatively new method of biblical interpretation. As will be seen, the implication of following this system of theology leads to a significantly different interpretation of end-times biblical prophecies when compared to the eschatological views that result from using the system of covenant theology. Not only that, but the future of Israel is looked at in a significantly different manner as well. Before getting into those differences, a little history concerning dispensationalism is in order.

John Darby (1800-1882) is considered the founder of the classic tenants of Dispensational theology. Later, his views were expounded in the classic Scofield Reference Bible. Men such as Lewis Chafer (founder of the Dallas Theological Seminary), John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie have added definition and refinement to this way of looking at God’s dealings with mankind. Although the defined system of dispensationalism came along about two hundred years ago, there have been references to “dispensations” since the early Church. Justin Martyr, Irenaus, and Clement of Alexandria are just three of many examples of early Church Fathers who wrote concerning this concept that they found within the Bible (the exact quotes demonstrating this aspect of their theology can be found in Ryrie’s book, *Dispensationalism)*. Even so, there are some individuals who suggest that, since this system of theology was developed and codified a couple of centuries after the introduction of covenant theology, it must be of less value. Simply put, there is no validity in that suggestion. Each point of view must stand on its merits… not when it was introduced. Should we reject the idea that the earth is round since that concept was introduced relatively recently?

The word dispensation comes from the Greek word oikonomia, which means “stewardship”. The basic idea is that God has divided up the entire existence of mankind into several different dispensations or stewardships. That is, although God never changes, he does relate to mankind in different ways depending on the time-period in question. God’s *economy* varies over time and it is altered as we, his creation, approach the end-times. Our understanding of how God dealt with his people in the past is very important to our understanding of what is to come in the future. Let us take a closer look at some of the aspects of this method of understanding the Bible:

* A dispensation is defined as a period of time in which God deals with mankind in a particular way, often guided by a covenant (i.e. a very special agreement between God and man) made by God. The use of the word covenant here should not be confused with its use in *Covenant Theology*. God administers his world in a particular way in each different dispensation. The original *Schofield Reference Bible* stated that it was “**a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.**”
* Each different dispensation has its own unique features that are revealed by God. Ryrie notes that there are three distinguishing characteristics of a dispensation: a change in God’s governmental relationship with man, a resultant change in man’s responsibility, and a corresponding revelation to effect this change. There may be some similarities that run between dispensations.
* Many people define seven different dispensations: Pre-Fall, Conscience, Government, Patriarchal, Mosaic, Church, Millennial. Some texts give these different names. A detailed explanation of these dispensations can be found in many books on the subject, but will not be offered in this treatise. There is no set number of dispensations that must be adhered to in this system. There may be things that are instituted in one dispensation that carry over or are modified in the next. Some promises given in one dispensation may not be fulfilled until another.
* Dispensationalists use a ***literal approach*** to biblical interpretation.
* The ***glory of God*** is the basic underlying principle to understanding the Bible. This is a distinction from covenant theology which sees the underlying principle as the salvation of his elect (although they certainly give much credence to his glory as well).
* Dispensationalists take the view that a better understanding of the glory of God can be seen if God is viewed in the variety of ways that can be noted when looking at his dealings with mankind and his creation in the various different dispensations from eternity past. One frequent charge that covenant theologians bring against dispensationalists is that their dividing up the Bible into several dispensations destroys the unity of God’s Word. That is, the Bible ceases to be viewed as a whole. Dispensationalists respond by noting that the exercise of expounding about certain interesting biblical distinctions does not automatically destroy the overall unity of its message. In fact, by showing the various ways that God has chosen to deal with humanity over the millennia, his glory and power have become even more manifest. It would appear that even Calvin agreed when he wrote, “God ought not to be considered changeable merely because he accommodated diverse forms to different ages, as he knew would be expedient to each….. If a householder instructs, rules and guides his children one way in infancy, another way in youth, and still another in young manhood, we shall not on this account call him fickle and say that he abandons his purpose. Why, then, do we brand God with the mark of inconsistency because he has with apt and fitting marks distinguished a diversity of times?” Or, why would one do the same injustice to the dispensationalist?
* There was some confusion in the past concerning the belief of dispensationalists concerning the absolute requirement of faith for salvation in Old Testament times. This was most likely an outgrowth of an ill-advised comment by Schofield in the first edition of his Reference Bible**.** However, he later made clear that he recognized that a person is saved only through faith. Today, the teaching of dispensationalists and covenant theology concerning the necessity for faith for salvation is essentially the same… with one interesting caveat: covenant theology has adopted the view that everyone that is saved is saved through *faith in Jesus Christ*. In some mysterious manner, they suggest, God has allowed all Old Testament saints at least some knowledge of the gospel message as carried out by Jesus. Because of this, these Old Testament saints came to believe in this gospel and were therefore saved. Of course, this would somehow have to be the mechanism that those people around the world who otherwise have had no chance to hear the gospel message in the typical fashion would have to be saved as well (for example, the classic example of an African tribesman in the isolated jungles of Africa). Dispensationalists take a different view. They also believe that all people are saved by faith and faith alone. They also believe that it is the blood of Jesus sacrificed for the elect on the cross which results in the salvation of all the saints. However, they believe that God judges their faith based on the information that he has provided them. This concept can be seen in the writings of Paul…

“For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--**his eternal power and divine nature**--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20)

God mentions that no one will have an excuse for a lack of faith. However, no mention is made in the above verse that they will have been told of Jesus. God gave the Old Testament people a clear outline of what they were to believe in and trust in for their salvation. No mention was made of his Son Jesus coming to earth, living a perfect life, and then sacrificing himself on the cross for his elect… at least as far as can be gleaned from the Bible. That is the reason that dispensationalists take the view that everyone is saved by faith… but, faith that is placed into whatever God has made clear to each particular individual. That varies depending on time and place. No one but God knows who is correct concerning this issue of where or to whom one must place their faith in order to be saved. However, everyone can be sure that God will do what is perfectly just and proper!

* Dispensationalists certainly recognize ***Israel as separate from the Church***. Charles Ryrie says that this is probably the most discriminating test as to whether a person is a dispensationalist. Although God is now dealing primarily with the Church, he is certainly not finished dealing with and blessing Israel; they are, in fact, his “chosen people.” God will honor his covenants with Israel and their leaders of old (e.g. Abraham, Moses, David). This is a very major difference between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

**Other Systems of Theology:**

The two major systems of theology in the world today have just been outlined in some detail. As one might imagine, these are not the only two. In the past twenty years, there has been an effort by some men to fine-tune their interpretation of dispensationalism. Their resulting system has generally been referred to as Progressive Dispensationalism. Three men seem to stand out primarily because they authored the first books on this modified view in the early 1990s: Robert Saucy, who wrote, *The Case For Progressive Dispensationalism*, and Dr. Craig Blaising and Dr. Darrell Bock who co-authored *Progressive Dispensationalism*. This view is seemingly an attempt at combining some of the aspects of covenant theology and dispensational theology. It really does not do much to help in determining the best way to interpret end-times prophecy. It adds nothing to the question of whether Israel remains distinct from the Church in God’s end-times plan. Therefore, the details of this system will not be discussed. For those who are intrigued by this idea, the books mentioned above would be a fine resource as is the web site, http://www.endtimes.org/progressive\_dispensationalism.html.

There is one other valuable contribution to this area of eschatology… it is called Historic Premillennialism. This is an end-times belief that combines covenant theological concepts with an actual Millennial Kingdom. This is not the usual covenant position on the topic of the Millennium.

**Summation**:

The basic concepts of covenant and dispensational theology have now been stated. Both are reasonable methods of looking at God’s interaction with his creation. Both have much to recommend them in the eyes of their adherents. They both hold tenants that honor God and the saving work of his Son, Jesus. Interestingly, looking at only the tenants as outlined above, it is not that difficult to accept both as being perfectly good methods of viewing the Bible. Covenant Theology is simply a broader view of God’s intentions and plans for his creation. The Holy Trinity has from eternity past had every intention of bringing his elect into a saving relationship with him through his Son. The history of the world and the Bible bring that into focus. One would think that the majority of dispensational theologians would agree with that conception, but, of course, they would break the Bible down a little further.

God obviously dealt differently with Adam and Eve before the fall than he did with Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. God gave the Law to Moses and expected the Israelites to live by it. By the time that Paul was teaching, he was telling his disciples to make sure that they did not trust in the Mosaic Law, but rather to trust in the Law written on their hearts. God also has given modern educated mankind much more information about his Son than he gave to Job and to those living in that ancient time. This is the simple concept behind dispensationalism. It is difficult to argue with those facts, it would seem. Again, in regard to the fact that these two forms of theology simply divide up the Bible in different ways, should not lead anyone to value one more than the other.

However, difficulty and dissension between these two major views does exist, and it lies in how some of their views are interpreted. Recall that the dispensationalist *attempts* to interpret the entire Bible literally. The traditional (or revised) dispensationalist believes that Israel in the Old Testament is the same as Israel in the New Testament and Israel in the end-times. Although the covenant theologian uses a strong literal hermeneutic (method of interpretation) for the majority of scripture, they do often tend to use more of an allegorical interpretation when it comes to verses relating to eschatology. As we shall see a little later, to the covenant theologian, Israel does not always mean the nation and people of Israel. In fact, the Church becomes the New Testament Israel. The people who believe this are bright, committed Christians, and the reasons for their conclusion on this topic are accepted by millions. Therefore, these two contrasting views (on Israel and the Church and the end-times) and the reasons behind them will be presented later (when we discuss the Church, the Millennium, and the Tribulation). Readers can decide which viewpoint they prefer.

As a little aside, it is not *required* that the classic view concerning Israel be taken in order to divide the Bible into dispensations… it is just that the traditional form of dispensationalism has always done so. If an individual had all of the same ideas as a typical dispensationalist, with the exception being that they felt that the Church had assumed most of the promises and covenants that God made to Old Testament Israel, they would still technically be a dispensationalist. This would be just another form of that general category. Actually, it is interesting and worthwhile exercise for any person to contemplate the system of theology that he/she believes is the best given their thoughtful interpretation of the Holy Bible.

Before getting to a discussion on Israel and the Church, another important topic will be broached that specifically addresses eschatology. That relates to the Millennial Kingdom. There are quite a variety of interpretations concerning this well-known topic. In today’s world, the majority of those asked would probably say that The Millennium will be a thousand year reign on earth by Jesus Christ after a seven year Tribulation. This is because so much has been written about this in recent decades, and many popular movies have been made with this same viewpoint. It is interesting to note, however, that this is not the most widely held view by the Church… even in our world today. It certainly will be of value to see just what the other ideas are on this Kingdom and why they are held. The next four doctrines will point out how covenant theologians and dispensationalists differ on these important topics.

1. **Doctrine of the Church**

It may be surprising to the reader to know that covenant theologians and dispensationalists even differ on their definition of the Church of Jesus Christ. That makes three major areas where they differ in their interpretation of the Bible:

1. The future of the nation and people of Israel
2. The interpretation of end-times prophecies – including the Millennium
3. The definition of the Church

So far, I have pointed out that covenant theologians look at New Testament believers as inheriting the Old Testament promises of God to Israel. Much time will be spent in showing how these two systems of biblical interpretation understand end-time prophecy later on in this treatise. Now, however, let us see how they each define the nature and origin of the church.

*Covenant theologians believe that the church is made up of the family of all true believers that has existed for all time*. Of course, this would include those who followed God before Abraham (e.g. Noah), all of the Old Testament saints that came after Abraham, and all believers in Christ since Pentecost. Wayne Grudem says that this definition states that the church is made up of all people who are saved – no matter when their salvation occurred. Grudem notes that Christ died for everyone that has trusted in God for their salvation. Therefore, he states that the church is made up of *all people* who Christ died to redeem.

*“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”* (Eph 5:25)

Those with this conception of the church believe that Jesus added to his church in a major way on the day of Pentecost, but that his church actually existed prior to his incarnation and sacrificial death on the cross. They point to the fact that people of God in the Old Testament were referred to using the same Greek term, *ekklesia*, as is used for the church in the New Testament. For example…

*“the Lord said to me,* ***'Gather*** *the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children. “*(Deut 4:10)

The Septuagint translates the word “gather” as being equal to the Greek term *ekklesia*. The author of Hebrews wrote that all present day Christians are surrounded by a great “*cloud of witnesses*.” (Heb. 12:1) Of course, this writer is pointing back to the great Old Testament saints. He exhorts the present day Christians to push on forward as we all work toward are future heavenly reward. He reminds them with the following words…

*“you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,* ***to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven,*** *to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,* ***24****to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.”* (Heb 12:22-24)

Once again, the word used here for those already in heaven, in the general assembly and of the church of the firstborn, is the Greek word *ekklesia*.

There are a few more examples that could be cited to show that the family of believers in Old Testament times were, at times, referred to using the same term as the New Testament uses for *church*. Grudem and others conclude that God has always looked at those who have placed their faith in him as members of his church. Therefore, they say, it is appropriate to look at the origin of the church as the time when the first person trusted in God for his salvation – in the early days of the Old Testament. There are many who disagree with this idea of the origin and make-up of the church, however.

For example, dispensational theologians believe that the church of Jesus Christ began at Pentecost. Let us take a look at their reasoning. Norman Geisler points out one important reason that he believes the origin took place at this later date is because the church that he is referencing is the New Testament church founded by Jesus. Specifically, this church is “an assembly of believers joined to Christ’s spiritual body by the Holy Spirit at the moment of regeneration when the individual places their faith in the Lord Jesus as their Savior.” (*Systematic Theology*, Norman Geisler, p. 1077) Geisler states that preparations were made for the church in Old Testament days as noted in the following verse… “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Gal 4:4-5) On the other hand, the resurrection and ascension of Christ had to have occurred prior to a proper functioning of the church. Dr. Harold Wilmington continues along this line of reasoning when he states that “the principal evidence that the church began on the day of Pentecost concerns the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord declared that this particular and distinctive ministry of the Spirit was still in the future, just before his ascension. On the day of Pentecost it first occurred. ….. This places the believer in the body of Christ.” (*The Doctrine of the Church*, Harold Wilmington, p. 5) Therefore, he concludes that the church began on that day.

One other reason mentioned to explain why it is proper to look upon the church as coming into existence at the day of Pentecost is the simple fact that it is spoken of as a “*mystery*” not to be revealed until New Testament times.

*“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles--* ***2****if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,* ***3****how that by revelation He made known to me the* ***mystery*** *(as I have briefly written already,* ***4****by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the* ***mystery of Christ****),* ***5****which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:* ***6****that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”* (Eph 3:1-6)

*“the* ***mystery*** *which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.* ***27****To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this* ***mystery*** *among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* ***28****Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”* (Col 1:26-28)

It does seem obvious that the gospel of Jesus Christ which reveals the good news that every man (both Jew and Gentile) have the opportunity to trust in Jesus for their salvation, was indeed, a mystery until New Testament times. I suggest that although a great deal is written about the coming Messiah in the Old Testament scriptures, the actual gospel message was indeed a “mystery” until revealed by Jesus. This is written about by Paul fairly often. Not only that, but the fact that the Holy Spirit would come and live within each new creation in Christ was also a mystery until it actually took place on the day of Pentecost.

God did reveal to Abraham and Jeremiah that one day in the future he would make a New Covenant that would include more than just the salvation of the Jews… Gentiles would be grafted into God’s plan.

*“Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country…..to a land that I will show you.* ***2****I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great….. and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* (Gen 12:1-3) In the book of Genesis, God tells Abraham that one day he will bless the entire earth because of what Abraham will accomplish during his lifetime.

*“this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”* (Jer 31:33) Jeremiah reveals that God will one day make a New Covenant where his law will be written in people’s hearts and minds… not simply on stone tablets.

*“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second……* ***12****For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* ***13****In that He says, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”* (Heb 8:7,12) The writer of Hebrews tells the reader that God’s Old Covenant was unable to accomplish all that God had planned for humanity. Therefore, God had sent his Son, Jesus, to establish a New Covenant whereby both Jew and Gentile could be made righteous in God’s sight.

*“Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' "* (Isaiah 49:6) The prophet, Isaiah, revealed 700 years before the birth of Christ that the Messiah would come to save the world… not just the Jews. Paul explains this plan further…

*“****For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was*** *not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but* ***through the righteousness of faith****…… Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that* ***the promise might be sure to all the seed****, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all* ***17****(as it is written, "****I have made you a father of many nations****" )…... It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,* ***25****who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”* (Romans 4:13,16-18,24-25)

Abraham would be the heir of many saved nations, not just Israel. He would become the father of both saved Jew and Gentile. Jesus would come into the world to save all those who would place their faith in him. Jesus would then become their righteousness before God the Father.

*“now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* ***14****For* ***He Himself is our peace, who has made both one****, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,* ***15****having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to* ***create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross****, thereby putting to death the enmity.* ***17****And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.* ***18****For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”* (Eph 2:13-18) Jesus had now made it possible for both Jew and Gentile to be saved.

Although the verses above show God’s plan of salvation, where does the idea come from that the church began at Pentecost? Many point to the words of Jesus… “on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matt 16:18)

This verse surely suggests that Jesus planned to start (build) ***his*** church at sometime in the future… not to add to one already in existence. It is true that the word *ekklesia* is the same word used for the assembly of God’s people in the Old Testament passages mentioned earlier. However, that certainly does not mean that all churches are the same. We cannot say that the present day Christian church is identical to the present day Mormon church, or the present day Islamic church. Of course, in this case, the ekklesia in the Old Testament and the ekklesia to be built by Jesus in the New Testament times both are made up of followers and believers by faith in God. Members of both of these churches will end up in the same place when they pass from this life into the next… i.e. heaven! John McArthur has a comment to make on these verses in Matthew, “Christ calls it “My church,” emphasizing that He alone is its Architect, Builder, Owner, and Lord. The Greek word for church means “called out ones.” While God had, from the beginning of redemptive history, been gathering the redeemed by grace, the ***unique church*** He promised to build *begins at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit, by whom the Lord baptizes believers into His body – which is the church*.” (The McArthur Bible Commentary, John McArthur, p. 1155)

There are many other verses in the New Testament that refer to the fact that this new church was brought into existence after Jesus accomplished his wonderful atoning work for mankind on earth. For example, Peter speaks of how people should come to Jesus…

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,* ***5****you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* ***6****Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."* (1 Peter 2:4-6)

Paul says pretty much the same thing to the people in the church of Ephesus. After reminding the people in this church how God had brought salvation to both Gentile and Jew through the blood of Jesus, he continued with the following explanation of how the church was built… and how the chief cornerstone was the Lord, Jesus Christ…

*“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* ***20****having been* ***built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone****,* ***21****in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,* ***22****in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”* (Eph 2:19-22)

It is worthwhile to note that these verses are often used by covenant theologians to back their view that the church includes all Old Testament saints. They say that verse 2:19 says that the New Christian becomes a fellow citizen with the saints and other members that are already in the household of God. They believe that this means that Paul is saying that the church began with the first follower of God… that first Old Testament saint. Although, I surely will not be dogmatic on this point, I agree with others, such as John McArthur, who wrote the following to explain his reasoning on this section of verses, “God’s *kingdom* is made up of the people of all time who have trusted in him.” (ibid, p. 1688) All believers are members of God’s *kingdom* – God’s household. As noted earlier, McArthur does not believe that these Old Testament saints are included in the New Testament church – the church that has Jesus as its chief cornerstone.The apostles and prophets spoken of in the next sentence are the New Testament apostles and prophets.

There are several other verses that seem to reveal that the New Testament church began at Pentecost. The following are a few of these:

“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**.” (Acts 20:28) Jesus purchased the church with his sacrificial death and resurrection.

*“He* (God the Father) *put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,* ***23****which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* (Eph 1:22-23) The church is the body of Christ. Therefore, it must have come into existence after his incarnation.

*“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”* (John 7:39) The church of Jesus Christ is made up of Holy Spirit filled Christians. The Holy Spirit came to new believers in Christ on the day of Pentecost and thereafter. Just before ascending into heaven, Jesus told his disciples to wait for that wonderful event to occur when he said, “you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5)

*“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.* ***13****For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.* ***14****For in fact the body is not one member but many.”* (1 Cor 12:12-14) Here we see that the church is looked at as a body. Other verses note that Jesus is the head of this body. Christians make up the remainder of the body… each having different roles to play in making this living body work effectively for God. This aspect of the church body is better explained in the following verses…

*“And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.* ***29****Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?* ***30****Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?* ***31****But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”* (1 Cor 12:28-31)

In the paragraphs above, I pointed out that there is a difference of opinion on when the church began and just what population of believers makes up the church. Frankly, it really just depends on how a person defines the word “church.” If one takes a moment to reflect, I think it becomes pretty obvious that both viewpoints are correct… given their differing opinions on the set of believers who make up what they call the “church.” Covenant theologians say the church must include all believers in God… all saved men and women. Dispensationalists say that the New Testament strongly points to the church as being brought into existence on the day of Pentecost… and that the set of believers in the church they are referring to require the death and resurrection of Jesus and the indwelling of each believer by the Holy Spirit. This, obviously, did not occur until Pentecost. In one true sense, this “church” is just a subset of the covenant “church.” Now, let me take a look at some of the more important characteristics of the church.

**The Church is visible and invisible**:  “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His." (2 Tim 2:19) The invisible church is the church as God sees it. The visible church is the church as believers see it. The local church is a visible manifestation of the invisible universal church. It is interesting to note that when Saul was struck down on the road to Damascus by Jesus, Jesus asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4) Jesus was pointing to the fact that by Saul persecuting his church, Saul was persecuting the head of the invisible and visible church… Jesus Christ.

**The Church is local and universal**: Any size body of Christians who meet to worship God can be referred to as a church. It can be a small group meeting in a home. Of course, it can be a typical local church in a city. The word “church” can also be used to refer to the entire community of Christians throughout the world.

**Metaphors for the church:** Although there are many metaphors for the church, the five most often used seem to be…

* The Body of Christ (Jesus is the head of this body) “*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.* ***13****For* ***by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body****--****whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free***.” (1 Cor. 12:12-13)
* Bride of Christ (Jesus, of course, is the groom) *“****Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her****,* ***26****that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,* ***27****that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”* (Eph 5:25-27)
* The Sheep and the Shepherd (Christ) *“I am the good shepherd.* ***The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep****.”* (John 10:11)
* The Living Stones and the Chief Cornerstone (Christ) *“you also, as* ***living stones****, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* (1 Peter 2:5)
* A Royal or Holy Priesthood (Jesus is the great high priest)*“But you are a chosen generation, a* ***royal priesthood****, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”* (1 Peter 2:9)

**The Purpose of the Church:** (the following are taken from Wilmington’s book,*The Doctrines of the Church*)

* To love God
* To worship God
* To glorify God through…

1. Fruit bearing
2. Giving
3. Preaching
4. Witnessing
5. Trusting God’s Word
6. Suffering
7. Prayer and praise

* To evangelize the world
* To baptize believers and celebrate the Lord’s Supper
* To instruct believers
* To discipline believers
* To edify and exhort believers
* To provide fellowship
* To provide help for others, including believers

**The Government of the Church:** There are three types of governmental systems in Christian churches today. Generally, they are referred to as:

1. The Congregational View: The Baptists, Congregational, and many independent churches use this form of government. It is characterized by placing the authority of rule with the members of the local church. The pastor serves as the only elder. Deacons are then chosen to help him in carrying out all of the duties of the church.
2. The Presbyterian View: Each local church elects elders to represent them. Reformed and Presbyterian churches have this form of government. Some elders are involved only in the governing of the church while others, such as the pastor, are involved in preaching, teaching, and administering ordinances.
3. The Episcopal View: This view has been adopted by the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, and Eastern Orthodox churches. It is a government led by bishops. These bishops are assisted by deacons and priests. Bishops make the decisions on the bishops who will succeed them.

**The Officers of the Church:** Apostles,Elders (aka Bishops or Pastors in the New Testament), and Deacons**.** I will not take the time to discuss the various qualifications or duties of these officers of the church. The New Testament does go into reasonably good detail regarding these offices.

**The Ordinances of the Church:**

* The Lord’s Supper – discussed in another section below
* Baptism – discussed in the next section

**The Future of the Church:** The Church has a glorious future. One day in the future, all those that are in the true (invisible) church will be raptured as they receive their glorified bodies (both those already dead and those still alive on earth). All those in the church will one day appear before Christ at the Bema Judgment. At some wonderful time in the future, all church members will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb with Jesus Christ. When the New Heaven and New Earth have been established by God, all those that make up the church (i.e. in this case, I am referring to all believers of all time) will live and reign for eternity as co-heirs with Christ.

1. **Water Baptism:**

There are two ceremonies that Jesus commanded his followers perform – water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. There is a difference of opinion between Roman Catholics and Protestants on the significance of both of these ceremonies. The Catholics refer to them as sacraments and believe that, in and of themselves, participation in the ceremony of both conveys *grace* to those involved. A second viewpoint, called the Protestant paedobaptist view, states that infant baptism is analogous to infant circumcision in Old Testament days. They say that since circumcision was administered to infants of Old Testament believers, infants of Christians should be baptized as a sign of these children belonging to a New Testament or New Covenant family. There is even a third group of Christians, Southern Baptists are representative of this group, that believe that baptism should be saved for only those individuals who can make a conscious decision to accept Jesus as Savior… this excludes infants. This decision should rightly be followed by what they refer to as “believer’s baptism.” Baptism is often referred to as an ordinance instead of a sacrament in many Protestant churches. We shall now take a closer look at the doctrine of water baptism.

**Meaning of Water Baptism**: The Greek word used for baptism is baptizo. This word is translated as “*to plunge, dip, or immerse*.” Hence, classically, a person being baptized would have been immersed under water. This makes sense if one thinks of the logical manner in which John would have practiced baptizing people in the Jordan River. It also makes good sense when one thinks about the symbolism of the act (noted later). Another example involves Philip and his baptizing of the Ethiopian eunuch, “*both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.* ***39****Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away.”* (Acts 8:38-39) Here we see that these two men were looking for a body of water to undertake the act of baptism… not just a little water for sprinkling over one’s head.

**The Symbolism of Water Baptism**: The book of Romans puts it nicely, “*do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?* ***4****Therefore* ***we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.5****For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,* ***6****knowing this, that* ***our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin****.”* (Romans 6:3-6) Paul said it similarly when writing to the church at Colossae…

Christians are to be “***buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith*** *in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”* (Col 2:12)

Obviously, the picture painted in the verses above require baptism by immersion… not just sprinkling. For those believing that this ordinance is symbolic of dying and having one’s old, sinful body buried, only to rise out of the grave in a brand new body, full immersion certainly makes sense. It should still be fine to express this symbolism by sprinkling… it just requires more imagination. Another symbolic aspect of full immersion is that it demonstrates that the new Christian has his/her sins washed away *completely* by their faith in Jesus. Finally, many see in the full immersion of the body, the image of going down into the waters of judgment and death. Upon rising out of the water, the new convert realizes how he/she is now alive again because of what Christ has done on the cross.

**Who should be baptized?** Baptism is meant only for Christians. Sometimes it is referred to as believer’s baptism in many churches. Ideally, it should follow soon after a person becomes a Christian. However, this is not required. Many verses show that baptism is meant for believers…

**“***Then those who gladly received his word were baptized*.” (Acts 2:41)

*“when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized*.” (Acts 8:12)

*“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*.” (Gal 3:27)

*“do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*” (Romans 6:3-4)

I have already pointed out the difference of opinion concerning infant baptism… to be discussed in a little more detail next.

**Infant baptism**: In all of the above verses concerning baptism, the person getting baptized is a believer. There is no specific mention in the Bible of infant baptism. There is also no prohibition to the practice either. Roman Catholics believe that infants must be baptized as, in their theology, baptism is a sacrament that is necessary for salvation… i.e. the act of baptism causes regeneration. It removes the penalty for original sin.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church on infant baptism: “*Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called. The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant Baptism. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth.” This is what the Catholic Church believes.

The Reformation began because Luther adamantly defended the proposition that salvation was by faith and faith alone. There was no place for any type of work at all in providing salvation to anyone. There was nothing that a person could add to the finished work of Jesus on the cross… except to receive his free gift of eternal life by faith. For this reason, the Protestant church rejects the value of infant baptism *as a mechanism to bring salvation*. Just as Paul scolded those who believed that circumcision was necessary in addition to belief in Jesus, we must recognize that baptism is not needed either.

“*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,* ***7****which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ*.” (Gal 1:6-7)

*“****a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ****, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified*.” (Gal 2:16)

I have already mentioned the fact that many Protestant denominations, including many Methodist, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches believe that infants of believers should be baptized. Their reasoning is that infant baptism is the outward sign that the baby is entering a family that has a covenant relationship with Jesus. It is analogous to the Old Testament practice of infant circumcision. Neither of these ordinances provided salvation for the baby, but they both indicated that the infant would be raised with the intent that the baby would, prayerfully and hopefully, come into a saving relationship with Christ as he matured.

A potentially serious problem of infant baptism is that it may well give the person who has experienced this in their infancy the mistaken impression that he/she is already saved. Of course, that is not true. Everyone must make a conscious decision to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord when they reach the age of accountability… when they can understand that they are lost and that they need a Savior… Jesus Christ.

It probably is worth mentioning that many Protestant churches do provide for a beautiful ceremony that has a similar purpose as the paedobaptist’s infant baptism. Yet, it is not a baptism nor is it called that. This is referred to as a **Dedication** or **Christening**. Admittedly, sometimes churches use the word christening interchangeably for baptism. In most Southern Baptist churches, however, Christenings (or Dedications) almost always involve naming the baby and having the parents and the church family vow to raise the infant in the church with the express intent of helping the baby grow up to one day accept Christ as Lord and Savior.

**The Necessity of baptism**:

**Catholic Catechism on baptism**: “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit *(vitae spiritualisianua)*, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word.’"

Although this is the stated belief of the Roman Catholic Church, this belief is wrong. Baptism symbolizes the fact that a person has been saved by Jesus… however, it is not necessary for salvation. There are innumerable verses in the New Testament that show that we are saved purely by the grace of God… and placing our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not saved by *any* work on our part… and that includes the work of being baptized. Note the following verses:

“*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the* ***gift of God****,* ***9******not of works****, lest anyone should boast*.” (Eph 2:8-9)

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that* ***whoever believes*** *in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*.”(John 3:16)

"*Most assuredly, I say to you,* ***he who hears My word and believes in Him*** *who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”* (John 5:24)

*“when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,* ***5******not by works of righteousness which we have done****, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,* ***6****whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,* ***7****that having been* ***justified by His grace*** *we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* (Titus 3:4-7)

*“Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”* (1 Cor 1:17)

Cornelius and those with him were saved by the preaching of Peter *prior* to being baptized. “*While Peter was still speaking these words,* ***the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word****.* [hence, they were Christians at that moment]*and those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered,* ***47****"****Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have****?"* [Obviously, baptism came after they had become saved]*And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord*.” (Acts 10:44-48)

Roman Catholics and those in the Church of Christ have at times referenced the following verses from 1 Peter to support their idea that baptism is required for salvation… “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us--baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*.” (1 Peter 3:18-21)

The fact is that this type/antitype example given by Peter shows just the opposite. Just as Noah and his family were not saved in any way by the water they found themselves surrounded by, but, instead, they were saved by their faith in God… Christians also are not saved by the water in the baptismal (or river) but are also saved by the faith they have placed in Jesus Christ… and this faith gives them a good conscience toward God.

One more blatant example of how baptism is not required for salvation was provided by Jesus while he was on the cross. Recall how he told one of the criminals at his side, “*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”* (Luke 23:43) Quite obviously, this man was not baptized, but he did go to heaven.

The ordinance of baptism is a wonderful thing and when properly carried out in the life of the new believer. It brings a beautiful spiritual blessing… for the new Christian and those observing the occasion. It is just that we should all recognize its limitations… it does not produce our salvation. It just symbolically portrays it.

1. **The Lord’s Supper:**

On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus gathered his disciples around him and together they took part in the Jewish annual Passover Feast. Not coincidentally, this feast was established over one thousand years earlier when the Jews were about to leave Egypt. It was most definitely a “*type”* of what was to happen to Jesus that night and the next day. Dake’s Study Bible defines a type as “a preordained representation wherein certain persons, events, and institutions of the O.T. stand for corresponding persons [almost invariably, Jesus], events, and institutions of the N.T. Types are pictures or object lessons by which God has taught his redemptive plan. They are a shadow of things to come.” I will leave for another treatise a discussion of the many types seen in the Bible. Instead, I will now review the significance of this particular Passover feast and discuss how Jesus expected his followers to remember and honor him by celebrating the sacrament of the “Lord’s Supper” frequently when they came together to worship. Other names for this sacrament include: the Eucharist, Communion, and The Lord’s Table.

Jesus instituted this ordinance while they were eating their Passover meal… “*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."* (Matt 26:26-29) In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote a few additional words when he celebrated the Lord’s Supper "‘*This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’**For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”* (1 Cor 11:25-26)

So, we see the actual words of the ceremony of that first Lord’s Supper. What is the significance of this sacrament to us? For one thing, when we take part in this ceremony, we remember what Jesus did for us. It is a reminder of the wonderful fact that Jesus went to the cross and gave his body and blood to pay the penalty for our sins. Only Christians are to participate in the Lord’s Supper… and as Christians we can celebrate our salvation granted to us by the grace of God and the atonement provided us through Christ.

There are four main views concerning what Jesus actually meant the bread and wine was to represent during the ordinance… these views are as follows:

* + 1. **The Roman Catholic View** – *Transubstantiation*: the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus. For example, the bread becomes Christ’s body right when the priest says the words, “This is my body.” Only a priest can perform this ceremony. Every time that this mass is repeated, Christ’s sacrifice is repeated – a real sacrifice involving his actual body and blood. This sacrifice is efficacious for the forgiveness of non-mortal (venial) sins.
    2. **The Lutheran View** – *Consubstantiation*: Luther believed that Christ’s body and blood actually penetrated and permeated the bread and wine in some mysterious manner. Luther used the example of a heated iron bar or water in a sponge. The iron bar remains iron, but the heat does permeate throughout its substance. The sponge and water also remain separate entities.
    3. **The Reformed View** –somehow, the bread and wine *spiritually contain* the body and blood of Jesus.
    4. **Memorial View** – Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) believed that the bread and wine commemorated the body and blood of Jesus. We were to partake in the ceremony to remember what Jesus had done for us on the cross… as he had said, “*do this in remembrance of me.*” (Luke 22:19) The value of the ordinance lies in the fact that the partaker has received the benefits of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross by faith. This is a good method to remember what Christ has done for us and to thank him for his sacrifice. This last view is prevalent in many Protestant and Baptist denominations today. They suggest that since Jesus was obviously not a part of the bread and wine at that Last Supper when he told his disciples that they were his body and blood, there is no logical reason to believe that they are today when we partake of the Lord’s Supper. They are a symbol of what he did for us when he gave his body and blood for us on the cross.

**What is the significance of the Lord’s Supper?** Those participating in this ordinance should take the time to reflect carefully and reverentially on its significance. The breaking of the bread should remind us of the breaking, torture, and flogging of the body of Jesus just before and while on the cross. The wine symbolizes the shedding of the blood of Jesus that was required to provide for the forgiveness of sins of those who trust in him.

Those who partake of the Lord’s Supper are proclaiming their belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord. They are symbolically showing that they identify with the necessary beliefs of all Christians. “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”* (1 Cor 11:26) In a sense, it is a booster shot for all Christians each and every time that they participate in this ordinance. It is an affirmation of their core Christian beliefs in the power of Jesus to save through his death on the cross.

**Who should participate in the Lord’s Supper?** There are certain requirements that should most definitely be met before a person participates in this sacrament. God meant the Lord’s Supper for Christians alone. Only those Christians who have examined themselves and find that they are living in a manner worthy of a Christian should take part. Otherwise, trouble could be forthcoming as Paul told the Corinthians… “*whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* ***28****But* ***let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself,*** *not discerning the Lord's body.* ***30******For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep****.* ***31****For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.* ***32****But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”* (1 Cor 11:27-32) Note that Paul says that there are many among the church in Corinth that are sick and even had died because they took this sacrament too lightly!

**Frequency to Celebrate**: There is no set frequency mentioned in the Bible for Churches to administer the Lord’s Supper. In early New Testament times, this ordinance was typically celebrated at every meeting. Later, it was observed weekly as a rule. Today, each church should set their own schedule… but, I believe that most churches that I have attended partake in this ordinance far too infrequently. I think it ought to be done at least once per month… at least… and not only at evening services.

**The End Times**

1. **Doctrine of the Rapture:**

The Rapture of the Church is something that I have been praying for since I was a child. What a wonderful event that will be for those Christians fortunate enough to be alive and on earth when it comes. So, what is this great event? Let Paul tell us… “*Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--* ***52****in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* ***53****For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* ***54****So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."****55****"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"* (1 Cor 15:51-55)

Paul also comforted the Christians in the church at Thessalonica with these words, “*I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.* ***14****For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.* ***15****For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.* ***16****For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.* ***17****Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*” (1 Thess. 4:13-17) We see that it is pretty clear that a day will come when Christ will return for his Church, for those that are both dead and alive, and that entire fellowship of believers will rise up into the air to meet the Lord in the clouds. All these believers will receive their glorified bodies at that time. Fantastic!

Let me just add that there is a difference of opinion on when the Old Testament saints will receive their glorified bodies. Many think that since they may not, technically, be members of the Church (when the Church is defined as those believers who trusted in Jesus and have been baptized in the Holy Spirit by Jesus since Pentecost), they will receive their glorified bodies right after Jesus returns at the Second Coming. In any case, the Old Testament saints will receive their resurrection bodies at the Rapture or shortly thereafter. It does seem to be true that the tribulation saints (those who are martyred because of their faith in Jesus during the Great Tribulation) will receive their glorified bodies just after the Second Coming. Now, let me continue with the discussion of the Rapture…

Many are convinced that Jesus was speaking of the Rapture when he said, “*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.****3****And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*.” (John 14:2-3)

There is a difference of opinion as to when the Rapture will take place. Let me briefly explain the differing viewpoints on this issue. First, let us look at those views taken by scholars who believe in a Great Tribulation followed by a literal Millennial Kingdom (the Millennial Kingdom will be discussed in more detail a little later in this treatise).

1. **Post-Tribulation Rapture**: Those with this belief think that the Great Tribulation will be essentially complete before Jesus returns. There are many different variations of this view. All with this view agree that if there is to be a great period of tribulation prior to the return of Christ, the Church will have to go through it. As the Tribulation reaches a boiling point and the Battle of Armageddon, Christ will return to earth. He will complete his Second Coming in two stages, one right after the other. First, Jesus will rapture the Church (those who have died and those still alive) and meet them in the air. Immediately thereafter, Jesus will lead these saints back down to earth to complete his Second Coming, defeat Satan at Armageddon, and usher in the Millennium.
2. **Mid**-**Tribulation or Pre-wrath Rapture**: Those with these views believe that the Church will be raptured either at the mid-point (mid-trib view) or sometime late in the seven year tribulation but just before God’s wrath comes crashing down on the earth (pre-wrath view). They believe that God’s wrath is not poured out until that time (many disagree with that premise). Proponents of these two views do agree that Jesus will then come down to earth at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation to defeat Satan at Armageddon and usher in his new 1000 year earthly kingdom– and that will be his Second Coming.
3. **Pre-Tribulation Rapture:** This has become the most popular viewpoint since the late 1960s. So much has happened related to signs of Christ’s Second Coming and the rebirth of Israel that the evidence now greatly favors those who hold this view… at least, in my opinion. In this view, the Church will be raptured into the air and then be taken up into heaven by Jesus, where they will remain all throughout the Great Tribulation. The Church will not go through this time of wrath. Many prophecy scholars believe that the Bible’s description of the end-times is very consistent with this view. Of course, those with the other views disagree. For those that want to see the plusses and minuses of all of these views, I strongly recommend reading my book entitled, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Bible Prophecy, Past, Present, and Future.* This can be read in its entirety on my web site, [www.nicholsbiblestudies.com](http://www.nicholsbiblestudies.com).

There are some who do not believe that there will be an actual 1000 year Millennial Kingdom. These folks typically believe that when Christ comes again (The Second Coming), He will immediately set up the New Heaven and New Earth. Typically, theologians who take this view do not believe that there is any difference between the verses others see as distinguishing between the Rapture and the Second Coming. More will be said about the two major views of this type – Amillennialism and Postmillennialism - when discussing the Millennial Kingdom.

**Conclusion:** The Rapture will be a glorious time for believers. Jesus will come for his Church and call them up (both those already dead and those still alive) to meet him in the clouds. It is a separate event from the Second Coming. The Rapture is imminent… it could happen at any time. For those who wonder about that point, I suggest the reading of my book, *Fifty Signs of the End Times, Are We Living in the Last Days?* There are no additional events that need take place prior to the Rapture… literally none. The Rapture will be followed by the Second Coming. As noted above, most modern day prophecy teachers believe that it will take place seven years prior to the Second Coming… the Great Tribulation will take place between these two events. Others believe that the Rapture will take place during the seven year Tribulation. Still others view the Rapture and Second Coming as two aspects of the same event… Jesus will rapture his saints, prepare them quickly for battle, and then return with them to defeat Satan and the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon.

1. **Doctrine of the Second Coming:**

There is little disagreement among theologians about the fact that Jesus will come again. He certainly will. Biblically, there is no doubt. The character and honesty of Jesus requires his return to earth one day. He told us that he will come again. Not only that, but he promised one day to rule the world as the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. He surely did not do that on his First Coming. He will when he comes again. We have just discussed the first phase of his Second Coming, which is known as the Rapture. As noted, that will be when Jesus returns to meet his followers in the air as he re-unites their spirits with their glorified bodies and takes them back with him to heaven (or, as we noted some believe, to return almost immediately to earth to complete stage II of the Second Coming). The actual Second Coming I am speaking of in this section is when he will set his feet on the Mount of Olives, quickly defeat Satan and the Antichrist, and then set up his Millennial Kingdom. This will occur at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation. He will appear at that time in order to defeat the Antichrist and his army at the infamous battle of Armageddon. Prior to his arrival, the world situation will look extremely bleak for Israel and all the remaining tribulation saints. However, with the arrival of Jesus, that will all change immediately.

Note a handful of the verses that tell of his Second Coming:

1. *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.****30****Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

(Matt 24:29-30)

1. “*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.* ***12****His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.* ***13****He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.* ***14****And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.* ***15****Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.* ***16****And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.****17****…….* ***9****And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.* ***20****Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.* ***21****And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.”* (Rev 19:11-16,19-21)
2. "*And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”* (Rev 22:12)
3. "*Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints,* ***15****to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”* (Jude 1:14-15)
4. *“In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.****3****And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself*.” (John 14:2-3)
5. *“Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle.* ***4****And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south….Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You.”* (Zech 14:3-5)

So, we see that Jesus will return one day in the future to defeat Satan and the Antichrist. He will then usher in the Millennial Kingdom. He will reign with his saints during that 1000 year period and then bring in the New Heaven and the New Earth. As noted when discussing the differing views on the Millennial Kingdom (soon to be discussed), there are some who think that when Jesus arrives at his Second Coming, he will simply usher in the New Heaven and New Earth… without an intervening 1000 year kingdom here on earth. I do not agree with this idea (see my reason in the section on the Millennial Kingdom), but it could be true. Regardless of one’s opinion on the Millennial Kingdom, all reasonable theologians recognize the following:

* The Second Coming of Christ will occur one day in the future, preceded by the Rapture.
* This will result in the saints (followers of Christ) gaining their permanent glorified bodies (at the Rapture).
* The saints will return with Christ to live and reign with him in heaven and earth (with or without an intervening 1000 year Millennial Kingdom here on earth).
* Christ will judge his followers at the Bema Judgment Seat and, later judge the unrepentant sinners at the Great White Throne Judgment.

1. **Doctrine of the Tribulation:**

The Tribulation is still another event that is looked at differently by those with different eschatological views. Let me mention the four major ways that this time period has been looked at over the centuries:

1. **Preterist view**: There are some who believe that the Tribulation spoken of in the Bible already took place during the first century. In fact, there are some very bright and impressive Christian scholars who hold this view… at least the “moderate” preterist view. “Moderate” preterists think that all of the prophecies noted in Matthew 24-25 and those in *The Revelation* relating to the Tribulation took place from the time of Christ’s resurrection up to the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, except for the resurrection of the saints into their glorified bodies and the actual Second Coming of Jesus. They do believe there will be no coming Great Tribulation. On the other hand, “full” preterists believe that every New Testament prophecy relating to the Tribulation and Second Coming have already come true… and they did so in the 1st century. Oddly, they believe that Jesus has already come again (prior to A.D. 70), and that we are already living in the New Heaven and New Earth… in some esoteric spiritual sense. This view is rejected by almost everyone… and for good reason.
2. **Post-millennial view** **of the Tribulation**: Most with this view also believe that the Great Tribulation took place during the 1st century. However, there will be another brief period of intensified tribulation (due to the releasing of Satan at the end of the millennium) just before Christ returns. However, this will not cause any significant problems for the Church, and it will be of brief duration. This view has also come upon hard times over the last century because their idea that Christianity will one day usher in a beautiful period of a golden age of peace seems so ludicrous after seeing the evil people such as Hitler, Mussolini, Pol Pot, Islamic terrorists, etc. continue to bring into the world. Most people now realize that it will take the Second Coming of Christ to usher in the prophesied age of peace… the Millennial Kingdom. Another reason that this idea has been mostly rejected is the amazing prophecies that have been coming true in recent history… the scores of end-time prophecies that were prophesied to come true just prior to the coming Great Tribulation, Rapture, and Second Coming.
3. **Amillennial view of the Tribulation**: The world will enter a period of increased tribulation with the appearance of the Antichrist just before the Second Coming. The Rapture and the Second Coming will take place at essentially the same time… the former just prior to the latter. There will be no actual 1000 year Millennial Kingdom on earth to follow a seven year Tribulation. Instead, Jesus will usher in the New Heaven and New Earth right after he returns.
4. **The Premillennial view of the Tribulation**: A very short time after the Rapture, God will allow for a seven year period of marked Tribulation on earth at the end of this age. The last half of this Tribulation (i.e. the second 3 ½ years) will be an intensified period of suffering during which time God will really pour out his wrath on the people of the earth and the earth itself. There will also be much suffering brought on by the Antichrist and Satan during this entire period of time that will be aimed especially at God’s people. A large remnant of Israel (Jews) will finally recognize Jesus for who he really is, and many millions will turn to him and be saved. The book of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* describes this seven year period in detail. The Tribulation begins with the signing of a peace treaty between Israel and the Antichrist, and ends with the Second Coming of Christ to defeat the Antichrist and Satan at Armageddon. This period is almost immediately followed by the ushering in of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. Daniel prophesied about this time over 500 years before Christ…

*“Then he* [the Antichrist] *shall confirm a covenant with many for one week* [seven years]*; but in the middle of the week* [after 3 ½ years] *he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate."* (Dan 9:27)

“*For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.****22****And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.”*(Matt 24:21-22) Jesus spoke of this time during his Olivet Discourse… just days before going to the cross.

**Conclusion:** I strongly believe that the last viewpoint is the correct conception of the end-times Great Tribulation. The past sixty years has had so many prophecies come to fruition that relate to the Second Coming and the coming Antichrist, the only view of the Tribulation that makes very good sense is the pre-millennial view… in my opinion. Not only that, but that is the only view that points to an actual 1000 year Millennial Kingdom on earth… and, as is pointed out in the doctrine of the Millennial Kingdom, there is strong evidence for an actual Kingdom on earth – with Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords - to follow the Great Tribulation. Of course, obviously there are many who disagree with me on this point. Let us take a look at the *Doctrine of the Millennial Kingdom* next…

1. **Doctrine of the Millennial Kingdom:**

All throughout the Holy Bible, God gives people the hope of a future kingdom that will be ruled by the beneficent Messiah. This future hope is noted by virtually all of the Old Testament prophets, many of the apostles and even the Messiah, himself… Jesus. The people of Israel were looking ahead to the day that their Messiah would come and usher in a wonderful new Messianic Kingdom on earth. Isaiah and Ezekiel wrote extensively on this topic as they described the wonders of this time and place. The Messiah did indeed come. Upon his First Advent, Jesus did bring in a new kingdom. However, it was not the type that the Old Testament saints had come to expect. He spoke to the Pharisees about a kingdom that would be within the believer. He also spoke frequently of another type of kingdom… one that would be material and in the future. That one sounded much more like the kingdom described to, and by, the prophets of old. The book of *The Revelation* also seemingly points to a future one thousand year Messianic Kingdom… if taken literally. However, there still is a mystery surrounding the exact nature and timing of this future kingdom. There is certainly a difference of opinion on just when this kingdom will appear and what it will be like. God has left room for a difference of opinion on the interpretation of many of the eschatological verses (as will become apparent below). Over the centuries, there have been three major theories concerning the timing and characteristics of the “Millennial Kingdom”. These three concepts will be described below. Three aspects of each interpretation of the “kingdom” will be developed as follows:

* A listing of the basic concepts of each kingdom idea will be presented.
* The reasons why that view has been accepted by some will be given.
* A few of the main objections that others have to that particular conception of the kingdom will also be pointed out.

**Amillennialism**:

The first concept of the Millennial Kingdom that will be presented here is the most prevalent in Christendom today and has been since the time of St. Augustine. It is called amillennialism.

The whole idea behind amillennialism is that Christ’s Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom. There will be no actual Millennial Kingdom on earth. John Walvoord, a well respected prophecy scholar, defines amillennialism as follows: *“Satan is conceived as being bound at the first coming of Christ. The present age between the first and second comings is the fulfillment of the millennium. There will be no more millennium than there is now,……the eternal state immediately follows the second coming of Christ.”*(*The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 6)

Among those with this viewpoint, there are two sub-groups. In the first group are those who think that Jesus is reigning over his saints in heaven at this time and ever since he became the first-fruits of salvation after his ascension. This is the view held by Kim Riddlebarger, who wrote a fine book on this subject, *A Case for Amillennialism*. He refers to this as Reformed or Realized Amillennialism. There is no Kingdom here upon this earth. Those with this belief rely heavily upon the allegorization of the Scriptures, as there are so many biblical passages where a literal interpretation suggests that the Kingdom will be here on earth. However, many people who hold to the amillennial view actually do believe that this *spiritual* kingdom is currently here on earth. Adherents of both of these concepts do not believe that there will be a future time when Christ actually comes back to earth to live and reign. The future reign with Christ described in Revelation 20 is considered to be ruling with Christ in heaven and not on earth. Amillennialists believe that the following verses refer to souls of Christ’s followers that are currently in heaven… i.e. that these verses do not refer to a future time…

*“I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.* ***5****But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.* ***6****Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”* (Rev 20:4-6)

Amillenarians generally agree that “the thousand years [is] a symbolic number, spanning the entire “church age.” (ibid p. 210)

*“I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.* ***2****He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;* ***3****and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”* (Rev 20:1-3)

Regarding the binding of Satan, the idea is that Satan cannot deceive God’s people with relative impunity as he did before the Messiah came. Satan, they say, was bound by Christ at Jesus’s First Advent. This binding means that Satan cannot deceive the nations until he is released at the end of the millennial age. He is still allowed to create some havoc on the earth, but he is not allowed to keep the Holy Spirit from convicting some people to come to Christ. So in that way, he is bound.

Quite obviously, the amillennial view of theology uses an allegorical approach to Bible prophecy. These theologians see the world we live in now as the Millennial Kingdom of God. It is just that the reign of the saints is in heaven (or in the *hearts* of the saints on earth). They do not believe that there will be a final fulfillment of God’s covenants with the nation of Israel as the Church has become the spiritual Israel since the time of Christ. Apparently, those promises meant for Israel are being fulfilled in a mysterious, allegorical fashion even now. This is the view of covenant theology which is shared by almost all adherents of amillennialism. As has been pointed out above, there are those that have raised significant questions with this method of interpretation. Of course, as one would expect, the intelligent Christian adherents to this belief system have thoughtful answers to the objections raised.

There are many promises of blessing to come in the Millennium noted throughout the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament. These do not seem to be coming to fruition on the earth today. It is difficult for many, especially in modern times, to believe that we are currently living in the beautiful thousand year reign of Jesus as portrayed in the Bible, especially as described in *Ezekiel*, *Isaiah* and *The Revelation*. For most Christians this sure does not feel like the promised Millennial Kingdom read about in the Scriptures. Of course, those accepting this amillennial view generally believe that the biblical chapters that many take to be a description of the Millennial Kingdom on earth are actually a description of the eternal New Heaven and New Earth… the eternal residence of all those who love God. As will be shown a little later, Premillennialists believe that the eternal Heaven and Earth will be fashioned by God only *after* the completion of the thousand year Millennium. One last point should be mentioned concerning this particular controversy. If it can be shown that there are distinct differences between the Millennial Kingdom and the New Heaven and New Earth, the evidence shifts strongly to those holding a premillennial view of the Kingdom. Later in this section, evidence of exactly this nature will be presented.

There are other ways to look at the Millennial Kingdom. Two more deserve attention in this treatise. After these are presented, it will up to the reader to decide which one, if any, seems most likely to be true.

**Postmillennialism:**

The second view of the Millennial Kingdom to be discussed here was not really developed until a minister from England named Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) came on the scene. He was very liberal in his views, even to the point of being called a heretic by many. However, his view of the Millennium was one of his views that was not just totally dismissed. The belief among historians is that some became receptive to this view mainly because of the many advancements that began with the Reformation. There had been many great achievements in the fields of art, science, and philosophy. Humanism was growing greatly. Many intellectuals in the world at that time were beginning to believe that man himself was on the path to some glorious future. The idea was that there would be an inexorable advancement upward for mankind in every respect, including morally. This would end with the ushering in of the golden age of the Kingdom. Unfortunately, many horrible events (WWI, WWII, massive famines and pestilence, and the wholesale slaughter of so many cultures (e.g. the Jewish Holocaust, ethnic cleansings of Somalia, Darfur, Bosnia, etc.) in the twentieth century have put a marked damper on this idea. Oddly enough, there are still some who keep this concept alive into the early years of the 21st century. Certainly, there is a similarity with the beliefs of Secular Humanism and New Age Religion in that they also teach that people will be able to progressively advance to a point where mankind will issue in a special Age of Enlightenment. Once that time comes, the postmillennial adherent believes that Jesus Christ will return to earth.

Kenneth Gentry defines this idea as follows: “Postmillennialism expects the proclaiming of the Spirit-blessed gospel of Jesus Christ to win the vast majority of human beings to salvation in the present age. Increasing gospel success will gradually produce a time in history [which they identify with the ‘millennium’] prior to Christ’s return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of people and of nations. After an extensive era of such conditions the Lord will return visibly, bodily, and in great glory, ending history with the general resurrection and the great judgment of all humankind. Hence, our system is postmillennial in that the Lord’s return occurs after an era of ‘millennial’ conditions” (Gentry, Kenneth, “Postmillennialism”, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, p. 13-14) (<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/the-postmillennial-view-of-the-kingdom-of-god>)

**Types of Postmillennialism:**

There are two basic types of this belief system, Biblical and Liberal. Simply put, the former suggest that the Holy Spirit will work in *individuals* to such an effective degree that someday there will be enough excellent Christians to bring in a Utopian Society. This will be done by the great power of the Holy Spirit as he works his wonders through humanity. The Liberal idea focuses on *society*. They believe that it is the ultimate goal of the Church to preach the “social gospel” and bring society into a New Age of peace, beauty, health, love, etc. In other words, society will eventually progress until it brings Jesus to earth to claim his already “perfected” earthly Kingdom. This liberal conception of Postmillennialism is totally unbiblical. The basic tenants of Biblical Postmillennialism are as follows:

* The Millennium will end with the return of Jesus Christ.
* The thousand years noted in Rev. 20 is not to be taken literally – instead, it is a long period of time between the First and Second Advents of Jesus when the Church will be progressing gloriously towards its ultimate state reached just prior to the return of Jesus.
* The Millennial Kingdom is not a literal, earthly kingdom. It is spiritual… i.e. Christ living within the hearts and souls of each Christian.
* With an ever increasing percentage of Christians in the world, and their ever increasing move towards sanctification, eventually the world will reach a time of spiritual and moral excellence. It will not be perfect, as there will still be some unbelievers. However, it will be so close that it will be a glorious world, and it will be ready for Jesus to come again to this world filled and dominated by Christianity.
* Israel is not distinct from the Church at this time in history.
* Since this view believes that we are currently living in the Millennium, Satan is bound. Therefore, Satan cannot keep Christians from marching on to the excellent, Christianized world that awaits.
* They take many prophetic passages as allegory – as required to suit their needs in interpretation.
* Interestingly, although they see the world increasingly improving until it reaches the point where Jesus will come again, it does believe in a final revolt by Satan yielding a sudden increase in evil just before Jesus comes back.
* Jesus will judge all mankind upon his return. There will be a general resurrection that will include everyone at that particular time. Believers and angels will enter eternal bliss in heaven; demons and unbelievers will enter hell, where they will experience everlasting punishment.
* Interestingly, this view has many similarities to that of amillennialism. The main difference is that this view sees the world getting more and more Christianized due to the workings of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of believers as we approach the Second Coming. In fact, it is this Christianization of the world that eventually will bring Jesus back to earth to claim his Kingdom, so to speak. Unfortunately, the Bible reveals a major problem for those who hold this view: "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.****30****Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*.” (Matt 24:29-30) Jesus told us in his Olivet Discourse, that times of Great Tribulation will immediately precede his Second Coming… not that there would be a time of amazing peace and prosperity because of the Christianization of the world just prior to his return.
* As noted earlier, the amillennial view sees the world getting much worse just before Christ comes back. Yet, he comes back for the same reason that folks who hold this post-millennial view believe he will come back to do… that is, to usher in his eternal Heavenly Kingdom (i.e. to set up the final New Heavens and the New Earth).

**Premillennialism:**

Interestingly, the view of the early Church concerning the Millennial Kingdom parallels that of most modern day prophecy teachers and writers. In the first century after the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit was actively working within many of the apostles (e.g. Paul, Peter, John) in the writings that would eventually become the New Testament. Most of the early Church Fathers had intimate contact with either these men or men who were taught by these men. One would expect their ideas concerning the interpretation of the Scriptures to be correct. At least these views would be much more likely to be correct than the interpretations that would follow hundreds of years later, especially given that those later views were unfortunately influenced by Greek philosophy. Author Charles Feinberg once wrote, “Every book that we have read and studied on the question of the millennium, whether it was favorable or unfavorable to the doctrine, or whether it gave full force and value to the testimony or tried to dissipate its implications, admitted freely that the entire Church of the first three centuries was premillennial, almost to a man. (Charles Feinberg, *Premillennialism or Amillennialism, 1961)*

Take a look at this partiallisting of early Church Fathers who believed in a premillennial view of the end-times: Ignatius (bishop of Antioch), Papias (bishop of Hierapolis), Justin Martyr, Irenaeus (bishop of Lyons), and Tertullian. For example, Papias wrote, “There will be a Millennium after the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Jesus will be established on this earth.” (http://www.christianchallenge.org/hebraic-foundations/HF045-2.html) Take a look at what Justin Martyr wrote, “But I and whatsoever Christians are orthodox in all things do know that there will be a resurrection of the flesh, and a thousand years in the city of Jerusalem, built adorned, and enlarged, according as Ezekiel, Isaiah, and other prophets have promised…” (*The Millennial Kingdom*, Walvoord, p. 120) All these men and many more lived and wrote prior to A.D. 200 and all believed in the basic tenants of premillennialism that will be noted in some detail below.

With some of the events of the last sixty years, especially the amazing fact that Israel once again has become a nation – seemingly in a miraculous fashion - Bible believing theologians have once again been brought back to realizing the total veracity of the Scriptures. No matter how unlikely something seems (such as Israel becoming a nation again), if the Bible says it will happen, it will happen.

This premillennial view of prophecy in this current age is held by teachers such as Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, Perry Stone, Tim LaHaye, John MacArthur, and Thomas Ice, and was held by the late Grant Jeffrey. This is the viewpoint that teaches that Jesus Christ will return to earth *before* the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom of God. The Millennial Kingdom will be a literal thousand year period of time on earth during which Christ will live and reign over mankind as a perfect benevolent king. Virtually all *dispensationalists* take this point of view on the end-times. Let us take a look at just some of the evidence that may well suggest that this premillennial view is the correct viewpoint concerning the Millennial Kingdom.

First, we should recall that those who disagree with this view believe that when Jesus returns He will set up the final heaven and earth right away. They also state that the verses in the Bible that describe a beautiful future age are describing the *final* heaven and earth – not an intervening Millennial Kingdom. However, as will be shown below, the Bible describes a wonderful future age that is markedly better than any age ever experienced on this earth, but still this time is well short of what the final heaven and earth will offer. For instance:

“*No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For* ***the child shall die one hundred years old****, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.* ***21****They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.* ***22****They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;* ***for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people****, And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.* ***23******They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, And their offspring with them. 24 "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear****.* ***25******The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox,*** *and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," Says the Lord.”* (Isaiah 65:20-25)

Life will be very nice during the Millennium, but babies will still be born… and deaths will still occur. Certainly, there will be no death once the final heaven and earth are created by God. Here is another verse that shows that this time will not be totally perfect…

*“with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips* ***He shall slay the wicked. 5****Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.* ***6****"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.* ***7****The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* ***8 The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.******9****They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.* ***10****"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."* ***11******It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people****….. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”* (Isaiah 11:4-12)

It will be a wonderful world, but these descriptions do not fit with what heaven will be like. For example, in the verses above we see that Christ will still have to exact punishment on those few who choose to turn against him during this time.

*“She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne*.” (Rev 12:5)

God tells the reader of *The Revelation* that one day the Messiah (male Child of Israel) will rule over all nations… with a rod of iron. This rod of iron will only be necessary prior to the final heaven and earth. There will be no sin in our eternal state and, therefore, no need for Christ to “rule all nations with a rod of iron.” Once again, this verse is consistent with the premillennial view of an actual Millennial Kingdom.

*“And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, Half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur.* ***9****And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be-- "The Lord is one," And His name one……The people shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, But Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.”* (Zech 14:8-11) “*And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.* ***17****And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain.* ***18****If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. …..****20****In that day "HOLINESS TO THE LORD" shall be engraved on the bells of the horses. The pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar.* ***21****Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord of hosts. Everyone who sacrifices shall come and take them and cook in them. In that day there shall no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.”* (Zech 14:8-11,16-21)

Here we see a description of the beginning of the Millennium. Those nations who had come against Jerusalem and the Jews were going to have to go to Jerusalem yearly to worship Jesus in person. If not, they would be punished. Hence, this could not be the final state for earth.

*“Give the king Your judgments, O God, And Your righteousness to the king's Son.* ***2****He will judge Your people with righteousness, And Your poor with justice.* ***3****The mountains will bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.* ***4****He will bring justice to the poor of the people; He will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor.* ***5****They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.* ***6****He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth.* ***7****In His days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more.* ***8****He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.”*(Psalms 72:1-8)

Here we see the Bible shows that in the Kingdom Age, Jesus will reign to the ends of the earth. That has not taken place yet.

*“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.* ***3****Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths."* ***For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4 He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore****.*” (Isaiah 2:2-4)

This is still another example of the actual Millennial Kingdom on earth. Jesus will serve as the perfect, benevolent judge and king. The description above does not sound like a perfect heaven.

There are plenty of other reasons why so many believe in an actual Millennial Kingdom. I have listed and discussed most of these reasons in my book, *A Comprehensive Analysis of Prophecy, Past, Present, and Future.* This book goes into great detail on all aspects of eschatology. As I mentioned earlier, it can be read and downloaded on my web site, [www.nicholsbiblestudues.com](http://www.nicholsbiblestudues.com).

One other reason that there are so many that believe in a future Millennium is that the Bible says that Satan will be bound during that time:

*“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.* ***2****He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;* ***3****and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.”* (Rev 20:1-3)

Those who would like us to believe that we are currently in the Millennium (amillennialists) claim that Satan is somehow bound from harming Christians at this time… and has been since Christ defeated him at the cross and through his resurrection. That is difficult to believe when one considers the irrefutable facts. For example, the Bible gives a multitude of examples of Satan tormenting people. Therefore, any theory that would suggest that Satan has been bound since Christ’s victory over him on the cross, would seem to seriously break down. For example:

* *“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that* ***Satan has so filled your heart*** *that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?’”* (Acts 5:3)
* *“****The god of this age* (Satan) *has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ****, who is the image of God.”* (2 Cor 4:4)
* *“He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,* ***2****in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to* ***the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience****,* ***3****among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”* (Eph 2:1-3) Satan is still working effectively in the world to cause rebellion against God.
* *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.* ***14****And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”* (2 Cor 11:13-14) Here we see that Satan uses his evil powers of persuasion to deceive mankind concerning the true gospel of Christ.
* *“Be sober, be vigilant; because* ***your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.****”* (1 Peter 5:8)

These verses are from a period of time after the Lord’s sacrificial death… and, therefore, after Satan would have supposedly been prohibited from tormenting humans (due to his defeat at the cross and, supposedly, his resultant immediate binding). As the verses above (and many others in the epistles) point out, Satan is very active on the earth today. That will not be the case during the Millennial Kingdom. His activity will not just be restrained or restricted but *completely eliminated* during this kingdom period. Hence, there must be a *future* Millennial Kingdom… Simply put, Satan is much too active today for us to be living in the Millennium! Besides the verses noted above, there are many other New Testament Bible verses showing the influence that Satan still wields over mankind at this time (e.g. 2 Cor. 4:3-4 & 11:14)

Although there are actually several other reasons that suggest to so many that the premillennial view of the Millennial Kingdom is correct, I would suggest that the primary reason to believe in a future, actual Millennial Kingdom is that it is what the Word of God literally and clearly teaches. Immediately after teaching that God would bind Satan for one thousand years in the first three verses of Revelation 20, God’s Word continues… “*And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And* ***they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years****.* ***5****But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.* ***6****Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.* ***7****Now* ***when the thousand years have expired,*** *Satan will be released from his prison* ***8****and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.* ***9****They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.* ***10****The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* (Rev 20:4-10)

Kim Riddlebarger, a well-respected amillennialist believes that the thousand years is just a symbolic number; it really just relates to the fact that this period will span the entire church age. Riddleberger, and others with his view, simply refuse to believe that God meant the reader to accept the above verses as being a time period of 1000 years. It is not difficult to see the problem that premillennialists have with his interpretation. Of course, anyone can say that one thousand years does not mean one thousand years, but, there is no reason to think that this is one of the rare instances in the Bible where God did not mean what He said when He spoke of a number. It is quite obvious that a millennium is 1,000 years in length. The only way of getting around this is to call upon more allegory in one’s interpretation of the Bible. This is not a problem of consequence for those adhering to the amillennial viewpoint. The millennium is just a figure of speech, they say. It should be looked upon as just a very long period of time. What is the evidence for this position? None. Instead, it should be pointed out that when numbers are used elsewhere in the Bible (whether being used in prophecy or not), they are interpreted in the normal manner. Seven means seven, twelve means twelve, and so forth. In some cases, God may choose the number to have a secondary significance, but it still has its primary meaning as well. For example, when God used the number forty as he did when describing the wandering in the wilderness, he had at least two reasons for doing so. For one thing, the Israelites did indeed wander for forty years in the wilderness. Secondly, God probably chose this number of years (as opposed to 41 or 39, for example) partly because it has another meaning – it is often thought of as the number of *probation or trial*. Twelve is a number long associated with *governmental perfection.* We see that there were twelve disciples and twelve sons of Jacob. The important point here is that these numbers still related to the actual number of disciples and sons. If God had another reason to make the Millennial Kingdom 1,000 years, so be it… there is still no reason to believe that it was anything other than 1,000 years in length.

I have just reviewed a few of the many reasons that so many current Bible scholars now adhere to a literal Millennial Kingdom that will be ushered into existence by Jesus right after his Second Coming. Of course, there are a few other views as noted. No one should be adamant about this topic as it is not critical to a correct understanding of the gospel and the path to salvation.

1. **Doctrine of Death and the resurrection of the dead:**

The Bible tells us that everyone will one day die and then face one judgment or another. “*it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment”* (Heb 9:27) Although there will be an exception for those who are raptured, this truism is essentially inclusive of all humanity. There is a great deal of difference for Christians who die vs. non-believers. Christians simply pass from this life into a much better life, immediately. Non-believers pass into a much worse existence… but, both are still alive, in a spiritual existence initially.

Paul reminded the Roman Christians that, “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* ***2****For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”* (Romans 8:1-2) Not only that, but Paul looked forward to his eventual reunion with Christ. “*So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.* ***7****For we walk by faith, not by sight.* ***8****We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*.” (2 Cor 5:6-8) You see, Paul was a great man of faith and recognized the truth of what would happen when he passed from this life into the next… “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* ***22****But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.* ***23****For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*.” (Phil 1:21-23) It should be our prayer and goal as we strive toward our sanctification to one day have the outlook with which this great apostle had been blessed. Christians have nothing to fear about death. Jesus took care of that because he was willing to die and suffer the penalty for our sins. *“through death he* (Jesus) *might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,* ***1****and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”* (Heb 2:14-15)

When we die, our soul leaves our body. Rachel’s death is described in the book of Genesis in the following manner, “*as* ***her soul was departing (for she died****), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin.”* (Gen 35:18) As James said, “*the body apart from the spirit is dead.”* (James 2:26) In the case of a Christian, this soul (or spirit) is brought into the presence of the Lord.

Solomon poetically wrote concerning the aging and ultimate death of a man*… “****man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets****—* ***6****before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,* ***7****and* ***the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.****”* (Eccl 12:5-7)

There are many Old Testament verses that speak of souls living on in heaven after the death of the body (e.g. Enoch, Elijah, Job, David, …). Let me just mention one… David speaks to God about his future… “*For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.* ***11****You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore*.” (Psalms 16:10-11) Although there is special prophetic meaning in these two verses, they also point to the fact that David was aware that God would not abandon him when his body breathed its last on this earth. He knew that his soul would go to be with God.

There are even more examples in the New Testament of the soul leaving the body immediately after death. Take a look at just a few:

Jesus told the thief on the cross, “*And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:43)

"*Father,into your hands* ***I commit my spirit****!" And having said this he breathed his last.”* (Luke 23:46)

*“And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "****Lord Jesus, receive my spirit****."* ***60****And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep*.” (Acts 7:59-60)

*“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also* ***I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded*** *for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God.”* (Rev 20:4)

When an unbeliever dies, his/her soul immediately leaves the body of that person and enters into some form of eternal punishment. In Old Testament days, they were said to go to a place of torment in hades (sheol). They may still go there upon death today, or to some other similar place. This subject is not clearly discussed in the Bible. However, later, their soul will join with their resurrected body and then they will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment. At that time, the eternal fate of each unbeliever will be meted out by Jesus. Their eternal home will be in hell.

**How should a Christian look at death?** One might wonder why Christians have to die in the first place. The fact is that even though Jesus did come to save us from the consequences of our sins, we still do continue to live in a fallen world. Ever since Adam and Eve committed that first sin, death became an integral part of life on earth. Although Jesus conquered both death and Satan, we do not see the victory over either immediately. We still face the powers of darkness, and all of us have to deal with the decay and death of our body. Eventually, Christians have total victory over death… but, during this lifetime on earth, God plans to use disease and death in our quest for sanctification. There are many lessons to be learned as we deal with disease and death. Both are our enemies. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that, “*The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”* (1 Cor 15:26)… and it is. One glorious day we will all be able to sing out with Paul, “*When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."  "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* (1 Cor 15:54-55)

However, in the meantime, Christians should look at life as Paul suggested… as if it were a marathon race…*“let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,* ***2****looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith*.” (Heb 12:1-2) “*it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.* ***21****For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* ***22****If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me.”* (Phil 1:20-22) We need to remember as we struggle at times during our life here on earth… especially as death approaches, that God has plans for us. Paul reminds us all that “*we are children of God,* ***17****and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*” (Romans 8:16-17) How can anyone beat that? Wow!

**What happened to the Old Testament Saints when they died?** There are basically two ideas put forth as to where the Old Testament saints went while awaiting Jesus’ sacrificial death and resurrection. One group reasons that they would have gone to a section of hades known as paradise – a very nice place, indeed – because Jesus had not yet paid for their sins. After Jesus died and rose from the dead as the first fruits of salvation, all of these saints would have immediately followed him into heaven.

*“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.****23****But* ***each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ****.”* (1 Cor 15:22-23)

*“grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "****When he ascended on high he led a host of captives****, and he gave gifts to men."* (Eph 4:7-8)

Many with this view also point to the story Jesus told in Luke 16 concerning Father Abraham, Lazarus and the rich man (who is mentioned to be in hades). Those with this view of where the Old Testament saints waited until Jesus came, say that Abraham and Lazarus were located in the paradise section of hades.

On the other hand, there are many theologians who are convinced that these Old Testament saints did have their souls go directly to heaven after death. They believe that Luke 16 tells the story of a conversation between heaven (where Abraham and Lazarus were) and hades (the abode of the rich man)… not between paradise and hades. Although these scholars do believe that Christ was the first fruits for all those that followed him (i.e. the New Testament Church), this did not include the Old Testament saints… at least with respect to their souls. Jesus was indeed the first fruit of all when speaking of **bodily resurrection**. However, he was not the first to go to heaven from earth as far as a person’s spirit is concerned… according to this view. The fact is that these two groups of scholars simply differ on their interpretation of certain equivocal verses in the Bible. For example, take this Old Testament verse from Ecclesiastes, “*the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”* (Eccl 12:7-8) Those who believe that the saints in Old Testament times had their souls go directly to heaven, see this section of scripture as evidence for that point of view. Others think that these two verses say that the spirit indeed goes to God after death… but, after Christ was the first fruit of the resurrection of all spirits. I do not believe that the answer to this question is all that important. Everyone agrees that all believers’ souls have always been transported to a wonderful place immediately after death… either into paradise or into heaven. After Christ’s resurrection, all agree that every Christian that has passed from this life to the next now resides in heaven in spirit form. Third, all non-believers’ souls who have ever died now reside in hades or a similar place of torment… they will be given their physical bodies and be banished to hell after the Great White Throne Judgment.

**Is there a purgatory?** Although Roman Catholics believe in a place called Purgatory, there is no mention of it in the Bible. However, in the Apocrypha, Catholics find some support for this theory. The Apocrypha is not part of scripture for many good reasons… primarily because of errors noted in it and the fact that it suggests certain doctrines that are contrary to all of the teaching of the Bible. The major verse used to support the idea of purgatory is…*“Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be freed from this sin.”* (2 Maccabees 12:46) If this were true, prayers and petitions for dead people could bring some value… even in yielding the forgiveness of their sins. This idea is against everything taught all throughout the Bible… sins must be forgiven because of the grace of God – not by someone’s works. There is no such thing as purgatory.

**The nature of the Resurrection Body (glorified body):** Christians will be given their glorified bodies when Christ comes at the Rapture. This is clearly noted in the following Bible verses:

*“we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.* ***16****For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.* ***And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,*** *and so we will always be with the Lord.”* (1 Thess 4:15-17)

*“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--* ***52****in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,* ***at the last trumpet****. For the trumpet will sound, and* ***the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.******53****For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality*.” (1 Cor 15:51-53)

Jesus also spoke of all the dead, not just the believers…“an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice**29** and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and **those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.**” (John 5:28-29)

There are many verses in the Old Testament that reveal that the idea of bodily resurrection was known in those times too. For example, Job said, “*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.* ***26****And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,* ***27****whom I shall see for myself.”* (Job 19:25-27) Job recognized that although his “perishable body” would one day be destroyed, God would give him a new body that would enable him to *see God*. Isaiah was also aware of the resurrection of the body, “*Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.”* (Isaiah 26:19)

When our Lord returns, he will initially rapture his saints into the air. As noted a little earlier, some believe that he will then take these saints, with their newly acquired glorified bodies, right back into heaven where they will remain throughout the Great Tribulation… then return with Jesus to observe him defeat Satan and the Antichrist at Armageddon. That is the pre-tribulation rapture viewpoint. The post-tribulation view of the Rapture essentially combines the Rapture with the Second Coming… the Rapture will occur just before Jesus descends back to earth to win the battle of Armageddon. In both of these views, the saints will then enter into the Millennial Kingdom while “clothed’ in their glorified bodies. Anyone coming to Christ during the Millennium will be given their glorified body if they happen to die during this period of time or at the conclusion of the Millennium. Certainly all saints will enter the New Heaven and New Earth “clothed” in their glorified bodies.

God will set up the Final Heaven and Earth. This will either come right after the Millennial Kingdom (if there is an actual 1,000 year kingdom on earth) or right after the Second Coming (if there is not an actual Millennial Kingdom). I personally believe that there will be an actual Millennium. In any event, all saints will enter into the New Heaven and New Earth in their glorified body.

All people who have not trusted in Jesus for salvation will also be raised by Jesus; however, they are raised to face the Great White Throne Judgment. After writing about the saints who will live through the Millennium, John noted that following: “*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection*.” (Rev 20:5) In other words, God will raise the lost just before they are to face their judgment. The Bible has nothing to say about their resurrection body except that it will last for eternity… and be confined to hell.

Our glorified body will be like the resurrection body of Jesus*. “There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another.* ***41****There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.* ***42****So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is* ***imperishable****.* ***43****It is sown in dishonor; it is* ***raised in glory****. It is sown in weakness; it is* ***raised in power***.” (1 Cor 15:40-43) From this section of scripture, we know that our new body will be indestructible, powerful, and glorious. Although we will not have the omnipotent power of God, we will have tremendous power in our heavenly bodies. Besides being indestructible, they will be eternal. We will never get sick, worry, experience pain, or age. Christ seemingly was able to pass through walls. We may well be able to do similar things. We may even experience more than the currently experienced four dimensions (time, length, width, height). We will also bear the image of Jesus Christ… “*Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust* (Adam)*, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven* (Christ).” (1 Cor 15:49)

Our body and soul will not sin*.* God will make our new body so that we are not subject to the sinful desires that plague mankind in this age. “*It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”* (1 Cor 15:44) This new spiritual body will have the degree of perfection inside and outside that God intended us to have. We will finally be able to obey God completely. We will be in many ways like Jesus…*“we know that when he appears we shall be like him*.” (1 John 3:2) “*Lord Jesus Christ,* ***21****who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.”* (Phil 3:20-21)

We should understand that just as the disciples were able to recognize Jesus, our body will be very similar in appearance to our earthly body. I do not know at what age God will make us… we can safely leave that decision in his capable hands. We will be able to recognize the people in heaven that we now recognize on earth. The New Heaven and New Earth will be incredible places to live. I will write more on this topic when discussing the doctrine of heaven.

1. **Doctrine of Final Judgment:**

The Bible makes it very clear that every person will one day stand before the Lord and receive an accounting of his/her deeds and a ***final judgment*** that will determine their eternal destiny. We get one life to live, and then we all must face Jesus who will judge all mankind. There is, of course, no such thing as reincarnation.

“i*t is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”* (Heb 9:27)

“*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.* ***10****For* ***we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ****,* ***that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.11****Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.*” (2 Cor 5:9-11)

According to *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, the final judgment will take place after the Millennial Kingdom. Satan will have been released for a brief time as the Millennium draws to a close. He will again try to defeat God and his eternal plans… *“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison* ***8****and will go out to deceive the nations.”* (Rev 20:7-8) However, God will quickly put down this revolt… and it will be the last time the world and the people therein will see Satan and his demons… “*And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.* ***10****The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* (Rev 20:9-10) Here, we see the final judgment and punishment is dealt out to Satan. Demons will suffer their fate as well during this time…”*And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”* (Jude 1:6)

The very next paragraph describes the final judgment of those who have rejected Christ – this will be a judgment of all people who failed to respond to the gospel call in life… it is often referred to as **The Great White Throne Judgment.** Unfortunately, since these people were unwilling to accept the unmerited favor (grace) of God by accepting the free gift of salvation offered during their life on earth, they will be judged by their works. That is not a good thing. Remember, no man or woman will make it to heaven based on their works… because no one other than Jesus lived a sinless life. Perfection is required for entrance into heaven… or the perfect righteousness Christians are offered because of their trust in the Lord Jesus.

*“I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.* ***12****And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And* ***the dead were judged according to their works****, by the things which were written in the books.* ***13****The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.* ***14****Then* ***Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.****”* (Rev 20:11-15)

Jesus will be the person of the Trinity who will be the judge*. “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*.” (2 Tim 4:1)

“*He who judges me is the Lord.* ***5****Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.”* (1 Cor 4:4-5)

*“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*.”(John 5:22)

*“as* ***the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,27 and has given Him authority to execute judgment*** *also, because He is the Son of Man.****28****Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice****29****and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.****30****I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear,* ***I judge; and My judgment is righteous,*** *because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.”* (John 5:26-30)

As will be mentioned in the *Doctrine of Hell*, there will be degrees of punishment for those banished to hell. There are many verses, including some by Jesus, that point to this fact. For example:

“*But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.****23****And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.****24****But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."* (Matt 11:22-24)

“*that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.****48****But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few.”* (Luke 12:47-48)

"*Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,****47****who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation*." (Luke 20:46-47)

Again, this Final Judgment is referred to as **The Great White Throne Judgment**. No believers will take place in this judgment. However, believers will be judged by Jesus at an earlier time. This judgment is typically referred to as the **Bema Judgment.** At this judgment, Christians will be judged according to their works while on earth. This judgment will not have anything to do with whether one is going to heaven or hell… that has already been settled once the person accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. "*Most assuredly, I say to you,* ***he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life****, and* ***shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”*** (John 5:24)

However, Christians will receive more or less reward in heaven based on their activities on earth after they have accepted Christ as Savior. In other words, each Christian will be judged regarding the pursuit of their sanctification. The Bible does not go into any specifics regarding how Christians will be judged based on their works other than mentioning that certain activities/works will be worthy of receiving certain “crowns.” Exactly what that means is a mystery – it is certainly some form of reward. In any event, it is obvious that the more one obeys the commands of Jesus while living this life on earth, the greater their reward will be in heaven. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, pointed out that although the quality of a person’s Christian life will be judged by Jesus one day, the individual himself will always end up in heaven.

*“Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,* ***13****each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.* ***14****If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.* ***15******If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved,*** *yet so as through fire****.****”* (1 Cor 3:12-15)

There are many other verses that relate to the Bema Judgment…

“*lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal*.” (Matt 6:20)

*“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that* ***each one may receive the things done in the body****, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*.” (2 Cor 5:10)

*“For* ***we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ****.* ***11****For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, Every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."****12****So then each of us shall give account of himself to God*.” (Romans 14:10-12)

*“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”* (James 1:12)

*“there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*.” (2 Tim 4:8)

Before anyone gets the wrong impression, although there will be degrees of reward upon entrance into heaven, and people will have different positions and duties (presumably at least based partially upon their performance while on earth), the joy, happiness, and contentment that each individual will experience during their eternity in heaven will be absolutely perfect and complete. Remember, God has promised that everyone will experience perfect joy and happiness in heaven. There will be no anxiety or worry, or jealousy, or any other negative emotion. We won’t be involved in a jealous competitiveness with others. It surely would be great if everyone were able to experience that mindset while on earth right now – ultimately, that is the way God wants us to be.

Dispensationalists do believe that there will be one other significant judgment by Christ… this is referred to as the **Judgment of the Nations**. Tim LaHaye, John Walvoord, John McArthur, Warren Wiersbe, Harold Wilmington, and others hold this view. After the conclusion of the Great Tribulation, there will be millions of people left on earth. The Jews would have just experienced years of horrible tribulation by the Antichrist. Jesus will have just defeated Satan and the Antichrist at the battle of Armageddon… right after his Second Coming. The Old Testament prophet Joel wrote concerning this time in history… at the conclusion of the Great Tribulation…

"*For behold, in those days and at that time, When I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem,* ***2****I will also gather all nations, And bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; And I will enter into judgment with them there On account of My people, My heritage Israel, Whom they have scattered among the nations; They have also divided up My land.”* (Joel 3:1-2)

Jesus spoke of his judgment of the nations (and, specifically, those individuals within those nations) at the onset of the Millennial Kingdom…

"*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.****32****All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.****33****And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.****34****Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”* (Matt 25:31-34)

Jesus then explained to the “sheep” how he was blessing them for doing what he asked of them… being a blessing to his people. They would enter into the Millennial Kingdom and be saved for all time. It should also be understood that the good works of these “sheep” are not what saved them… but, these good works were indications of their saving faith. No one has ever been saved by good works nor will they ever be.

Then, he turned to the goats and said…. “*Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:* (Matt 25:41) Obviously, Jesus cast these unbelievers into hell and he went on to explain how they had rejected his commands. He concluded this parable with these words, “*And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (Matt 25:46)

Theologians who do not believe in an actual Millennial Kingdom (covenant theologians), look at this parable differently. In their opinion, when Jesus comes back from heaven – i.e. His Second Coming – he will promptly banish Satan and his demons to hell, separate the sheep from the goats as noted in Matthew 25, and then set up the final heaven and earth… as there will be no thousand year “age of peace” on earth. If these scholars are correct in their thinking, Jesus will simply separate the people who made it through the tribulation and then send the “goats” directly to hell and the “sheep” will be sent onward to heaven. Everyone still ends up where they belong, but just one thousand years earlier.

**Man’s Judgment of Angels and other men**: Satan and his demons will be cast into hell around the time of the Great White Throne Judgment. On the other hand, it appears that some humans will be involved in handing out appraisals or judgment concerning good angels according to Paul…

“*Do you not know that we shall judge angels?”* (1 Cor 6:3)

Not only that but the disciples will *judge the twelve tribes of Israel in some fashion…"Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”* (Matt 19:28)

**Why any judgment at all?** God does not actually require these formal judgments… yet, he has provided them. Why? Certainly, the purpose is not to come to the conclusion of who is going to hell and who is going to heaven. Nor is it to determine the level of punishment or reward for individuals. This will have been pre-determined by God… actually from before the beginning of the world. So, what is the purpose? Most theologians believe that God wants to make it clear to all people that his justice is being served in a very appropriate manner. Also, a formal process will serve to demonstrate better his holiness and righteousness. This Final Judgment will be a public process – everyone will have to face Jesus and, as Paul proclaimed long ago, all men and women will know the truth of the following statement…

“*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,* ***10****that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,* ***11****and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Phil 2:9-11)

Do not be a part of the Final Judgment!

1. **Doctrine of Heaven:**

Heaven certainly should be the wonderful goal of all Christians. In biblical terms, the heavenly abode of God, the angels, and our future home is referred to as the third heaven. The first heaven refers to the atmosphere close above us and the second heaven refers to the further reaches of the universe (the stars, etc.). This discussion will be confined to the third heaven… the one we all think about when that term is used.

We read about the creation of the heavens and the earth in the very first verse of the Bible. “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*.” (Gen 1:1) Although God is omnipresent, his throne room is in heaven, “Thus says the Lord: "*Heaven is My throne*.” (Isaiah 66:1) Jesus now sits at the right hand of God the Father in that throne room. *“After the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*.” (Mark 16:19) Angels make their abode there. All souls of departed believers have gone to be with the Lord in heaven. This is made clear throughout the Bible:

“*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever*.” (Psalms 23:6)

*“I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”* (Phil 1:23)

*“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”* (2 Cor 5:8)

**Heaven is an actual place**: Strangely, there are some who question whether heaven is even an actual place. Of course, the answer is a most resounding, “yes!” Jesus spoke about departed souls coming to be with him in heaven when he spoke these wonderful words of comfort to the thief on the cross, “*And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”* (Luke 23:43) The Bible also makes it clear that Jesus was going to a place when he ascended up into heaven… not that he was going to some ethereal concept of nothingness. *“Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven.”* (Luke 24:51) The story of Stephen’s ascension into heaven also speaks to its reality, “*But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God,* ***56****and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’”* (Acts 7:55-56) Also, there certainly needs to be an actual place for Jesus and his followers to exist since we all will have glorified bodies for eternity. Our bodies will be a reality; therefore, the location where these bodies exist must be a reality as well. In other words, heaven is an actual, physical place… the location of heaven is another question… one for which I do not have the answer.

**Heaven today:** Once God created heaven, it became his primary residence, so to speak. Of course, as mentioned above, since he is omnipresent, his essence is everywhere at all times. However, the Bible does state that his throne room is located in heaven. Since the creation of angels, their home has been in heaven. *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that* ***in heaven their angels*** *always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”* (Matt 18:10) As shown in the verses quoted earlier, all departed souls who have placed their faith in God also have their home in heaven. Interestingly, heaven will be re-modeled (or re-created) by God very soon after the Millennium and the Final Judgment. The Apostle John saw all of this happening in a vision many years ago…

*“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, …****12****And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works…….****14****Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.* ***15****And anyone not found written in the Book of was cast into the lake of fire…….. Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.”* (Rev 20:11-15)

**The New Heaven**: This New Heaven that God will create one day will last forever. God will not only create this New Heaven, but he will also create the New Earth. Although I use the word create to describe the method God will use to bring this New Heaven and New Earth into existence, there is a difference of opinion as to whether they will be entirely new creations (created out of nothing) or just major remodeling jobs of the current heaven and earth. There are some verses that suggest heaven and earth will be new creations, and some that imply that they will be remodeling jobs. For example:

**Verses suggesting the present heaven and earth will be re-modeled**:

*"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.***11** *They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment;***12** *Like a cloak You will fold them up, and* ***they will be changed****.”* (Heb 1:10-12)

*“You who laid the foundations of the earth, So that* ***it should not be moved forever****.”* (Psalms 104:5)

*“One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But* ***the earth abides forever****.”* (Eccl 1:4)

*“the* ***creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption*** *into the glorious liberty of the children of God.* ***22****For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”* (Romans 8:21-22)

**Verses suggesting the current heaven and earth will be annihilated and then replaced**:

*“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And* ***there was found no place for them****.”* (Rev 20:11)

*"Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven."****27****Now this, "Yet once more," indicates* ***the removal of those things*** *that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.”* (Heb 12:26-27)

*“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both* ***the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up****.”* (2 Peter 3:10)

The consensus of opinion does seem to be that our current heaven and earth will be markedly re-modeled – not totally eliminated. Most theologians do not think that God would do away with his original creation completely. They believe that God will remodel this earth and heaven and believe that the verses which seem to imply the elimination of the heaven and earth really only point to the fact that God will effect major change via a major overhaul of the current order. For example, he may burn the surface of this earth in order to bring in a more beautiful “creation” for eternity.

**Residents of this New Heaven and New Earth**: Along with God and his angels, all those who have trusted in Jesus as Savior plus the Old Testament saints will live in this New Heaven and New Earth in our glorified bodies. A portion of this New Heaven will descend toward the New Earth as described by John in *The Revelation*:

*“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* ***3****And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God*.” (Rev. 21:1-3)

**The Glory of this New Heaven:** John was shown the majestic beauty of this New Heaven. Here are his words as he described what he saw:

"*Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."* ***10****And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,* ***11****having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.* ***12****Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:* ***13****three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.* ***14****Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* ***15****And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall.* ***16****The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.* ***17****Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.* ***18****The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.* ***19****The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald,* ***20****the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.* ***21****The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.* ***22****But* ***I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. 24 And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light****, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.* ***25****Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).* ***26****And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.* ***27******But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life****.”* (Rev 21:9-27)

As can be seen, this incredible city will be made for all of the saved to “walk in its light” forevermore. There will be no entry for the unsaved. The New Jerusalem will be 1500 miles x 1500 miles x 1500 miles - about half the size of the United States. It could be in the shape of a cube or pyramid. It will be home to the believers. All of the inhabitants of this wonderful New Jerusalem will have access to the New Earth as well. We will live and reign with Christ. There have been several excellent books written about heaven. I suggest for those interested in learning more about their future home that they read; *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn, *Heaven, the Mystery of Angels* by Grant Jeffrey. Let me now give a short list of some of the characteristics of our future home:

* Heaven’s duration – forevermore “*eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”* (Titus 1:2)
* It will always be light – God will provide the light via his glorious presence. “*The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.”* (Rev 21:23)
* A place where there is no sickness, pain, anxiety or suffering, or death among the inhabitants of heaven -“*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."* (Rev 21:4-5)
* There will be many beautiful mansions for Christ’s saints. “*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.****3****and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*.” (John 14:2-3)
* Heaven will be a place of worship and music. “*The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"* (Rev 4:8) “*And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.* ***3****They sang as it were a new song before the throne.”* (Rev 14:2-3)
* Heaven will be a place of astonishing beauty. *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."* (1 Cor 2:9)
* We will do work that we will enjoy for the cause of Christ. “*there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.”* (Rev 22:3) “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” (John 10:10)
* We will have an incredible wedding supper one day with Christ. “*Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!*” (Rev 19:9)
* We will eat and drink and play while in heaven. Jesus ate and drank with his friends after his resurrection while in his glorified body. Our body will be like his. We will eat and drink – not because we will need to, but likely because we want to do so. For example, consider the fellowship that will come at the wedding supper of the Lamb. God will even supply a wonderful tree with real fruit that will play an important role in heaven.
* We will be reunited with loved ones. David was convinced that he would see his dead child again in heaven. “*Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."* (2 Sam 12:23)
* We will have increased knowledge and intelligence. “*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.”* (1 Cor 13:12) Although we will know much more once we gain entrance into heaven and have an increased capacity for learning, we will still be far from the having the omniscience of God.
* We will see God. When we are housed in our glorified, sinless bodies, we will be able to actually see God. This is referred to as the beatific vision. There are a few verses that tell of us this future reality, but one often used to show this amazing truth is… “*now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for* ***we shall see Him as He is****.*” (1 John 3:2) Many scholars say that this face-to-face meeting with God will do wonderful things to make us more like he wants us to be.
* We will be rewarded for our work for Christ while here on earth. Evidence for this has already been given in another section.
* We will be perfect – we will not sin, and we will be able to live the life that God has planned for his children.

There are many other characteristics and interesting questions to ponder concerning this future home of ours. Many have tried to answer questions such as: Are there pets in heaven?... Will we continue to grow in knowledge while there?... Where is heaven located?... Will we be able to explore distant parts of the universe while there?... Is there marriage in heaven? … What will we do for fun? Some of these questions have relatively easy answers. Others are more debatable. Those two books I mentioned earlier do a fine job of describing what heaven may well be like… of course, as Paul said after his vision of the third heaven… “*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows--such a one was caught up to the third heaven.* ***3****And I know such a man--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--* ***4****how he was caught up into Paradise and* ***heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.****”*(2 Cor 12:2-4) What Paul had revealed to him was so incredible that God actually gave him a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble. “*And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”* (2 Cor 12:7) One day all Christians will experience the opportunity of life in heaven. Once there, it will be our home forever!

1. **Doctrine of Hell:**

It is interesting that only 32% of people in a recent large survey said that they believed in hell – defined in the survey as a place of torment and suffering where people’s souls may go after death. That is pretty amazing since ~80% identified themselves as being a Christian (although only 43% of people polled said that they repented of their sins and had accepted Jesus as Savior). In other words, the majority of people who call themselves Christian do not either know or believe Jesus when he clearly spoke about hell on multiple occasions during his time on earth. For example, Jesus said when speaking of hell, “*In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*.” (Matt 22:13) He also made sure that all his listeners knew how critically important it was to avoid going there, *“if thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire.****44****where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”* (Mark 9:43-44) Jesus taught that hell was an eternal destination and once a person was sent there, they would stay there… forever.

We can define hell as an *actual place of eternal conscious punishment for the unsaved*. It is interesting that so many people believe that the God of the New Testament demonstrated so much of his love for humanity while he walked the earth, that he could never sentence anybody to eternal damnation. They say something like, “Oh, all that is just Old Testament stuff.” Well, it is not. Jesus spoke on the topic of hell more than any other individual in the entire Bible. Of course, Jesus spoke of his desire “*that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*.” (1 Tim. 2:4) Unfortunately, those people who reject God’s offer of salvation through his Son’s sacrificial death on the cross will not be allowed entrance into heaven. There is only one other alternative… hell. The Bible does say that hell was initially prepared for the Devil and his demons. In fact, it was Jesus that said hell is “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matt 25:41) However, it does serve a dual purpose as well. It is now ready for unrepentant mankind, Satan, and his demons. One day in the future, as discussed elsewhere in this treatise, the devil will be thrown into hell for all eternity.

*“the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”* (Rev 20:10)

As mentioned earlier, after the Final Judgment, all unsaved people will be thrown into this “lake of fire.” “*I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away…..* ***12****And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books…… And they were judged, each one according to his works.* ***14****Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.* ***15****And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*.” (Rev 20:11-15)

*“the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image.”* (Rev 14:11)

The Apostle Paul wrote about hell being the*…”****evidence of the righteous judgment of God****, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—* ***6****since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you,* ***7****and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels* ***8****in flaming fire,* ***inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.9****They will suffer the* ***punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might****, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”* (2 Thess 1:5-10)

The Bible does use metaphors to describe hell, no doubt. One that is used on multiple occasions by Jesus is Gehenna. Jesus simply used this word for hell. As would be expected, this was very insightful on the part of Jesus. Gehenna was a particularly foul, rotten smelling, city dump just southwest of the city walls of Jerusalem. It was despised by all Jews and residents of the city because of what it was and what it represented. Idolatry, including multiple decades of child sacrifice, had been practiced there in past centuries. At the time of Jesus, it was filled with refuse, feces, dead bodies, etc. Sewage was carried off through this area as well. It wreaked of a terrible smell and was always smoldering with fire (ever burning funeral piles). Jesus used it as a metaphor for hell partly because it had “unquenchable fires.” It was a great term to teach the populace of the terrors of an eternal hell.

**Annihilationism:** This isthe teaching that after God has punished unrepentant sinners for a time, he will just annihilate them and they simply will no longer exist. There are a variety of reasons that this concept has arisen, but it is not found in the Bible. Generally, those who propose this idea do so because they believe that eternal punishment in such a terrible place as hell is too harsh a punishment for a perfectly loving God to mete out. Apparently not. There are several things that we have covered in this book on the various doctrines of the Bible… some are difficult to understand. We already know that God’s ways are not our ways and that his edicts can be, at times, inscrutable. Our goal should be to understand what he says in his Bible to the best of our ability and to obey his commands as completely as possible.

**Levels of Hell:** It is also appropriate to remember that there will definitely be *different levels of punishment in hell*. People like Hitler and Stalin are going to be dealt with in a far different manner than most others who have rejected Jesus. Many theologians emphasize the fact that hell will be terrible for some primarily because the individual going there will get what they wanted while on earth… separation from the only true God of the universe, the Holy Trinity… God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These people will get what they wanted while on earth… but, they certainly won’t be pleased about it for all of eternity. No one will get a second chance!

**What about those who never hear about Jesus?** This question used to bother me a lot when I was a teenager. I could not see how a loving God could possibly punish someone who had never been given the chance to hear or learn about his Son. Now, I have an answer that comforts me on this issue. For one thing, I think about the Old Testament saints. I seriously doubt whether Moses, Jeremiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Joshua, Ruth, and so on, knew that Jesus (being total God and total man) would one day come and give his life on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. Yet, he did. These Old Testament saints and thousands more, are now in heaven. How did that happen? I believe that God, in his loving mercy, judged the Old Testament saints based on the information they were given during their life on earth. I believe that God does the same thing today with respect to those people living in “deepest Africa”… God judges them based on the information he allows them to receive. Sometimes, God may actually give these people visions or dreams to teach them about Jesus. There have been many reports about that very manner of communication coming from missionaries and now showing up on youtube. God may judge them based on other factors as well. All I do know for sure is that my God is too loving and too just to do anything that is not completely fair… and totally loving. I trust that God will take care of those people that I used to be so concerned about as a teenager. God will see to it that they are dealt with justly, and with love. If they are in the *elect*, they will be in heaven one day..

**Conclusion**: Hell is the place that God had created for Satan and his demons. It is now also to be used for all unsaved men and women. God has many wonderful attributes as we have noted earlier. He is love. Yet, he is just. His love caused him to send his only Son, Jesus, to provide a pathway to heaven for anyone and everyone who would only accept his free gift of eternal life. His justice requires him to reject and punish those people who reject him and his Son. He will send those individuals to a place called hell where they will remain forevermore. It will be a place of eternal separation from God… but, will justly have varying degrees of punishment based on each person’s works while he/she was alive. Again, that is required because God’s justice must be upheld. Hopefully, this knowledge will help those reading these words to witness to others who have yet to turn and accept Jesus as Savior… remembering, of course, that we can only witness to others; the Holy Spirit must bring these people the faith to respond.

1. **Doctrine of Man’s Free Will:**

The doctrine of free will is a very interesting doctrine of the Bible. In one sense, it is pretty straightforward as we will see. On the other hand, the areas in life where mankind is allowed to exercise their free will may well be limited – as we shall also see.

We must always keep in mind when discussing this topic that all people who will be saved have been previously elected by God. Those who are not of the elect will not be drawn to God (i.e. given the faith to believe) and therefore will be unable to choose to accept Jesus as Savior. There is very little doubt about the above statements. Here are just a few of the Bible verses that make it very clear that only the elect of God will be saved…

*“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* (Romans 8:28-30)

“*And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and* ***as many as were appointed to eternal life believed****.*” (Acts 13:48)

*“****He chose us in him******before the foundation of the world****, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love****5******He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ****, according to the purpose of his will.”* (Eph 1:4-5)

“*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because* ***God from the beginning chose you for salvation****”* (2 Thess 2:13)

So, we see that God decides who will be saved and who will not be saved – mankind has no free will in this decision, *it would appear*. So where do men and women have free will? Recently, I heard John McArthur put it this way, “Man's will is free to choose the form of sin that most appeals to him, but that's the limit of his freedom. When you talk about free will, we're talking about the freedom that the sinner has to choose his iniquity. That's what his freedom is, that's the sum and substance of his freedom. The one thing he's not free to do is to choose salvation, or to choose righteousness, or to choose holiness, or to choose God.” (<http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/GTY106/answering-the-key-questions-about-the-doctrine-of-election>)

This idea can be expanded by adding that all people have the free will to make all sorts of choices every day. Of course, these choices are limited by internal and external pressures – e.g. a blind man cannot choose to see - but, people are still free to make an infinite variety of choices. People are free to choose according to their nature and character. However, we must remember that our original character is not capable of choosing Christ. We are dead in sin. Unless God “elects” a person, and gives him/her the faith to believe, he/she will not choose him. The domain of choosing who will be saved is God’s alone. So again, this important area of salvation is where the idea of free choice is strained markedly. Once a person is regenerated by Jesus, he/she is able to freely choose to obey and follow him while working toward sanctification. Some Christians will work harder than others at this important task. Christians will use their free will while living for Christ, the unsaved will use their free will in every area other than choosing Christ as Savior.

When John McArthur was asked how he understands the seeming paradox between preaching that the gospel is offered freely to all and recognizing that God has not elected all to be saved, he responded by saying… “I have the same problem that a baby Christian who doesn't know much who is listening to this discussion is having. I have the same problem the guy in the Q & A on a college campus has when he asks me this same question. I have all those problems. But I'm content to say that's not a problem for God. If it's in the Scripture, I take it at face value. I cannot harmonize it all.”

Earlier, when writing on the doctrine of election, I mentioned that I would go into more detail later in this treatise on how I attempt to harmonize man’s free will (even in regard to salvation) with God’s sovereign decision to elect only a select number for salvation. John McArthur, as noted above, simply takes this intriguing “seeming paradox” at face value as he “cannot harmonize it all.” I have read some of those with the Calvinist philosophy attempt to harmonize God’s election with mankind’s free will – but, I did not see that they did it very effectively – because they still made God’s “election decision” completely independent of anything about the future individual in question. Although I may well not be correct in the way I understand this intriguing interplay between man’s free will and God’s election of some to salvation, it does make sense to me. Let me explain my viewpoint now…

First of all, I do agree with my Calvinist friends that God does not look down from above (figuratively speaking) from eternity past and simply see who would have chosen him if given the freedom to do so, and then elect them into his family. The Bible makes it clear that election is his decision, not ours. However, *I do believe that God takes into consideration each person’s attributes and character before he makes the decision to elect them or not*. Yes, this is a subtle difference, but it certainly makes sense to me and others with my point of view. It is very difficult to believe that God does not consider the individual in question when making such a momentous decision concerning their eternal destiny. In order to fully understand my reasoning when I suggest that *man’s free will is taken into consideration* by God when he chooses his elect, it is important that I explain my concept of God’s loving nature. Take a look at these verses:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that* ***whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.****”* (John 3:16)

*“He who does not love does not know God, for* ***God is love****.”* (1 John 4:8)

*“The Lord has sought for Himself a man* [David] *after His own heart.”*(1 Sam 13:14)

*“For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but* ***the Lord looks at the heart.****"* (1 Sam 16:7)

*“I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* (Jer 29:11)

*“The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."* (Zeph 3:17)

*“The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.”* (Psalms 103:8)

It is very obvious from these verses that God has great love for mankind. He wants only the best for his creation. The verse from Samuel points out that God does “look at the heart of man.”

I believe that he does this for many reasons. One reason, as I have already postulated, is to understand all about our character and desires. I believe that he uses this knowledge to help him make his decision concerning our future… will it be in heaven, or not? Does God take into consideration the character, attributes, and feelings of a person before deciding on their eternal future? The Bible does say that God looked at the heart of David before choosing him to be Israel’s next king.

I believe that the most significant reason that God made mankind with free will was because he wanted to experience a mutual loving relationship with them. Of course, he did not require this relationship, but the evidence strongly suggests that God wanted one. As C.S. Lewis and others note, with the gift of free will, men and women are given the choice to follow God or reject him. They now have the possibility to love God, ignore God, or even hate him. As we know, eventually Adam and Eve chose to use their free will to sin against God… to reject his edicts, thereby rejecting God, himself.

I believe that the vast majority of people recognize that without the possibility to reject/dislike/hate another person, there is no real possibility for love as we know true love. If a person is created so that he/she can only choose to love and follow his Creator, many (including me) would suggest that the Creator made a “robot” of sorts. For example, if a person on this earth could literally brainwash another to love them (and this may well be possible), I do not think that many would consider this relationship as being one of true love. Although I am not suggesting that God brainwashes the “elect”, the fact is that these people must invariably choose Christ as Savior (irresistible grace). Only when love is offered willingly is it truly love (in my opinion). God will provide only the elect with the necessary faith to believe and they will *always* use this faith and believe. I suggest that if God does not consider any personal characteristics about these elect individuals when choosing them to be Christians that these people do not have the opportunity to exercise their free will in this important area of salvation. Since the most important decision in life is what we do with Jesus – will we choose to love him or reject him - it would be very odd for God to make the decision for our election without considering some aspect of our character or attributes and our inherent feelings toward him. By considering our nature before his decision on election, he would be, in some sense, considering our likely free will choice, before his momentous decision.

If that is not the case, I do not see how that kind of relationship is consistent with the kind of loving relationships we are used to seeing on earth. If a man chooses a woman to be his wife regardless of any personal characteristics noted in the woman, and then manipulates that woman into loving him and then marrying him, how can that be considered a true loving relationship? This seems to be a pretty reasonable analogy (although not perfect, admittedly) to what the Calvinist philosophy is concerning how God chooses his elect. However, if the man in the above example knows all about that woman – every detail about her character, nature, etc., he could make an intelligent decision to choose her to be his wife. He would be able to choose someone that he knew could reciprocate his love and they would be able to have a beautiful marriage together. God certainly has this capability.

There are plenty of other examples in everyday life where people desire to be selected for a team or company but must wait for the owner (or general manager) of that corporation to select them. However, the owner takes a very serious look at the attributes and desires of all those under consideration before making his selections – just as I believe God does. The owner wants to choose people of excellent quality and he wants those individuals who want to be a part of his team. He will reject those who do not fit in with his team concept – actually, that is best for all concerned.

It is true that if we look at only one section of verses in Romans, it would appear that those with the Calvinistic philosophy are correct. Take a look at these four verses in the book of Romans:

*“He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.* ***19****You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’* ***20****But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’* ***21****Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”* (Romans 9:18-21)

I will admit that if these were the only four verses in the Bible I would be hard pressed to suggest that God considers the free will choices/personality/character of man prior to making his election. However, I am convinced that all reasonable Bible students understand that we cannot simply take a few select verses out of the context of the entire Bible and build a Bible doctrine. We must consider all of the Bible’s comments on the subject. There are many examples of how the selection of only a couple of verses to build one’s theology does not work. Here are three examples of why we do not want to do that (many others could be cited):

* *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.* ***8****For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”* (Matt 7:7-8)
* *“****If you ask anything in My name, I will do it****.”*  (John 14:14)

Obviously, as discussed earlier in the *Doctrine of Prayer*, there are many other verses that demonstrate mitigating circumstances that make it understandable that all of our prayer requests will not be fulfilled. Another example of the folly of using only a couple of verses for doctrine follows…

* *“****Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?******22****Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?* ***23****…...* ***24****You see then that* ***a man is justified by works, and not by faith******only****.”* (James 2:21-22,24)

If these were the only three verses that one referenced concerning salvation, a doctrine of salvation by works would result. Yet, we know that there are many other sections in the Bible that make it clear that people are saved by grace alone. Hence, the need to study and understand the entire Bible, in context, is made clear.

God gave the Israelites certain laws to live by in the Old Testament. However, we do not follow many of these laws in our society today, and we do not believe that God would want us to do so… For example, God commanded…

* *“For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him.* ***10****The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.”* (Lev 20:9-10)

Christians do not put to death children who curse their parents, nor do we do this with those who commit adultery in our society today. We consider the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament in carrying out The Law of Moses. That is, we look at the entire Bible before settling on doctrine. Many more examples of this type could be cited… as to why we should not come to conclusions concerning doctrine based on only a few verses in the Bible.

I have just given the verses suggesting that God can certainly decide how he wants to create each person – i.e. he is the Potter, we are his clay. He can have mercy on those he wants, and “harden” others. However, let us take a look at a few other Bible verses…

*“****For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son****, that* ***whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.****”* (John 3:16)

*“****The Lord is*** *not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,* ***not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance****.”* (2 Peter 3:9)

*“****God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved*** *and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Tim 2:3-4)

I suggest that any objective person looking at only the three verses above would come to the conclusion that God loves all the people in the world so much that he willingly allowed his Son, Jesus, to be sacrificed for the lives of all people in the world. God is not willing that any person should be lost – he desires all men and women to be saved by trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The problem, then, is harmonizing verses like these with verses referencing God’s elect and the “potter and the clay.” Some folks, like John McArthur, have given up on harmonizing these apparent disparate verses. As I explained earlier, I believe that there is a reasonable way to bring these two concepts (election and free will) into harmony.

One might wonder why God chooses those who will one day enter heaven via the method of election? I have no idea why. But, I do think that the explanation I gave earlier does harmonize God’s loving nature, man’s free will, and the election of the saints. Could I be wrong? Absolutely. But, I do think that we will one day find out that God did consider the character traits of each person prior to choosing his elect.

**To** **summarize**, I can think of only three reasonable options for how God chooses the elect:

He did it through election and without considering any attribute or potential free will choices of men and women. [This is how I believe those adhering to the Calvinistic theology look at election]. Each person is elected in eternity past regardless of anything that may be known about their future nature or character, and without considering any of their potential future free will choices. Some are “elected” to an everlasting future in heaven; some to an everlasting future in hell. I have two problems with this idea:

* + 1. If God simply chooses people for heaven or hell without considering their nature/character/potential free will choices, it becomes apparent that he is creating individuals who must follow his direction – there is no other choice for a person in this most important area of salvation vs. damnation. The idea that a person could offer their love to God becomes absurd. There would be no real choice to accept God or reject God. He would have created us to do only one or the other. He would have created a type of robot, in my opinion.
    2. Secondly, since we know by several verses I quoted above, that God wants everyone to be saved (e.g. 1 Tim 2:3-4, 2 Peter 3:9), it would seem very strange that an omnipotent and all-loving God would choose only some people for salvation and choose many others to spend an eternity in hell. Remember, if this Calvinist explanation is correct, God is not considering anything in the nature/character or potential future free will choices of mankind when he makes his decision to elect someone or not. [If he were, it would make sense that he would not elect those who would want to reject him] Why would a loving God not elect all mankind for salvation – since he wants all to be saved and he certainly has the power to do it. Remember, in the Calvinist conception of election, God is the sole determiner of who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. Any potential inherent free will tendencies of each man and woman are of no importance… again, according to Calvin. Something is amiss here…

God elected individuals only after considering the nature, attributes, and potential future free will choices of each person. This is, of course, my choice for the likely way that election works. If this conception of election is true, then election does allow for a truly loving relationship to exist between God and man… not a robotic one. Verses that reference God wanting all people to be saved now make sense. God grants each person their inner desire with his choice of election.

God elected people after considering some mysterious factors that will remain inscrutable to us.

I do have a difficult time believing that a God of love would elect some people to spend an eternity in heaven and, by default, ‘elect’ the remainder to spend an eternity in a devil’s hell without any reference to the desires and character of each person. For one thing, if God created people for destruction (the eternal destiny for all those that he did not elect), and he is not required to do this (which he isn’t), he could not say he wanted all to be saved. That would be a lie… and God does not lie.

The second choice above is the one I suggest is the most likely. Some say that allowing for this choice would take away from God’s sovereignty, power, etc. Well, look what Jesus gave up while on earth – yet he remained fully God. He gave up *utilizing* some of his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence to live the life of a human. God can choose to allow for mankind to influence his decisions on election (by virtue of their individual character traits and desires) in order to experience love – the love of a Father for and from his children. He still would remain very much our omnipotent God.

The third choice is not at all unreasonable, either. We all know that whatever God decides is best for his universe and his creation is, quite assuredly, best for us. At least with this third choice, we are saying that God has good and logical reasons for those individuals he elects and those he rejects and condemns to hell… he just does not want to share them with us at this time. I recognize that Calvinists will say the same thing concerning their conception of election… i.e God has good and logical reasons. However, their explanation seems to me to invariably lead to a robotic relationship between God and mankind. I do not believe that this is the type of relationship that God has created. This third choice does not necessarily lead to this “robotic” conclusion.

**Conclusion**: Obviously, there is quite a difference of opinion on the topic of free will and election. However, with the exception of the incredibly important decision concerning salvation, most all theologians agree that humans are given the free will to do whatever they are able to do based on their abilities and attributes. For the elect, this will include making choices that will move them toward their goal of sanctification once they become saved. Hopefully, each Christian will make good choices as they are led by the Holy Spirit. Those that are in the non-elect of God will be able to make any possible choice… except the choice to be saved. They will not want to make that choice, and, therefore will not make it.

1. **Doctrine of God’s Providence:**

The last doctrine to be discussed in this treatise is that of the providential care of God. I saved this topic for last because I believe that it encompasses much of all that we have previously covered and demonstrates God’s complete control of everything that happens in his universe.

In eternity past, the Holy Trinity decided to create the universe and everything in it. Most significantly, God created human beings and made them in his image. He knew exactly what he wanted to accomplish by this creation. Because of God’s omnipotence and omniscience, his goals for the world will be infallibly realized. He has eternal plans for heaven, angels, the world and all its plants and animals. Of course, God has wonderful plans for mankind… for his elect.

As I have discussed earlier, I believe that God gave man free willwhen he decided to create them with the capability to give and receive love. Of course, God was aware of the choice that would ultimately be made by the first man, Adam, and his wife, Eve. He was also acutely aware of the consequences of that first sin. Yet, he not only allowed Adam to exercise his freewill to sin, but provided a pathway for all men and women to gain redemption. God sent his Son to provide atonement for humanity.

Interestingly and wonderfully, God has done much more than this to cultivate and manage his creation down through the ages, and he will continue to do so. He has used his all-powerful, miraculous providential care to make sure that every single one of his plans comes true… exactly as conceived before the universe began. That is what is meant when speaking of God’s providential care. This doctrine can be defined as *God’s sovereign guidance of all events that take place in the universe so that all things inexorably move toward their divinely predetermined end result.*

Typically, God accomplishes this goal via an incredible series of miraculous interventions into the lives of men, animals, and nature. God typically accomplishes his goals for his creation in a subtle manner – *he works through and around the free choices of men and women to accomplish his will.* In other words, unless we are paying close attention, we may not recognize God’s hand in the events shaping the future… the world’s, and each of the elect. On occasion, he may use a more blatant miracle (one that usurps the laws of nature), but normally he is able to use his omniscience and omnipotent power to weave human events and natural occurrences to come to his desired result. Evidence of this can be found throughout the Bible, but is no better stated than in Paul’s letter to the Romans when he wrote, “*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

It is important to remember that prayer changes things. God instructs us to pray and make our desires known to him. *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”* (Matt 7:7) *“you do not have because you do not ask.” (James 4:2) “O Lord my God, I cried out to You, And You healed me.”* (Psalms 30:2) “*The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.* ***12****O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You!”* (Psalms 84:11-12) Dozens of verses tell the believer to come to God in prayer and supplication and make one’s desires known to God. He will answer prayer… in his time. We do need to remember that the answer to our prayers does depend on our being in the will of God. For example, see the second half of the verse quoted above from the book of James… *“you do not have because you do not ask.* ***3******You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.****”* (James 4:2-3)

We have been given the freedom not to pray, but it certainly is to our advantage to pray and stay in the will of God. How each Christian enters into God’s divine plan concerning his providential care of this earth will depend on how well people obey him and follow him. A Christian who truly dedicates his/her life to Christ will likely have a larger role in God’s plan for the world than those that sit on the sidelines. However, regardless of what any particular individual chooses to do, God is able to use every event, those that are good and those that are bad, and lead his universe to its destined conclusion. Only an omnipotent, omniscient Being could accomplish such a task… that is why God alone can do it.

The Bible gives many examples of how God uses both good and bad events and people to accomplish his will. Arguably the best Old Testament example concerns the life of Joseph. As you will recall, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. That terrible incident in Joseph’s life was followed by other betrayals against this fine young man. For instance, he was thrown into prison when falsely accused of an adulterous affair. However, God used all of these terrible events in his life to eventually bring Joseph to the position of Prime Minister of all of Egypt. It was in that position that he was able to do much good for the nations of the world at that time and for his people, the Jews. God had miraculously turned events meant for evil into a very good final outcome. The Bible explains it in this manner through the words of Joseph to his brothers… “*you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”* (Gen 50:20) The betrayal of Jesus by Judas is another example of God having the capability to use a terrible sin and turn it into a wonderful act of atonement. By the way, obviously this does not excuse those who did the original evil sin… it is just that God can use even sinful actions and use them for good… in time.

I really became aware of God’s providential care of the universe when writing my book, *Fifty Signs of the End Times, Are We Living in the Last Days?* I noted that the Bible taught of there being approximately fifty intriguing signs that would become manifest in the world just before the Second Coming. Literally, all of these signs have come onto the scene over the last 70 years (actually one appeared about 90 years ago). Some might say, and some do say, that these signs have always been in the world if one just looked for them. Not true. The fact is that it would be difficult to make a case for more than a handful of these fifty signs as having been seen in any century other than the last one… and even that would be a major stretch. So how is it that our world has now manifested these signs of the Second Coming? Obviously, it is because the Second Coming is just around the corner, and God has used his power to providentially move events towards this divinely appointed time. He has done it in amazingly subtle style – miraculously, but seemingly not done miraculously. These signs all coming to fruition at the same general time are great examples of his providential care over his creation.

Let us take a look at this principal of God’s providence in another way:

* God is sovereign. “*God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases*.” (Psalms 115:3)
* All things are possible for God. “*For with God nothing will be impossible*." (Luke 1:37)
* God created the world, and it is subject to him. “*Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.*” (Deut 10:14) “*among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand*.” (Dan 4:35)
* God has an eternal plan for this world and all within it: “*The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations.”* (Psalms 33:11) “*The Lord of hosts has sworn, saying, "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand*.” (Isaiah 14:24)
* It is impossible for mankind to completely understand God’s actions and plan for his creation. “*Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?* ***8****They are higher than heaven.”* (Job 11:7-8) *“He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”* (Eccl 3:11) *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.”* (Isaiah 55:8)
* Because of this fact, we should simply trust that God knows what he is doing and that it is for our ultimate good. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;* ***6****In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”* (Prov 3:5-6) *“we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

So, when we speak of God’s providential care, we are speaking of the mysterious manner by which God has formulated a benevolent, all-encompassing plan for his universe. It is being worked out according to this plan, day by day. This phenomenal power should call forth faith, praise, and worship in the minds and hearts of believers. Here are just a few additional examples demonstrating that all areas of his creation are controlled by God to work out his eternal plan:

* Animals: recall how God used a great fish to rescue Jonah from the Mediterranean Sea. “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” (Jonah 1:17)
* Nature: *“And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die.* ***18****But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark--you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.”* (Gen 6:17-18) *“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.* ***51****Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,* ***52****and the graves were opened.”* (Matt 27:50-52)
* The Heavens: “I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. **8** All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land,' Says the Lord God.” (Ezek 32:7-8)
* The Nations: When speaking of Israel, God said, “And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.” (Deut 5:15)
* Human activity: There are an incredible number of examples of God’s use of the actions of men and women in the world to work out his providential care of the world. We have already mentioned how he used the terrible action of Joseph’s brothers to yield ultimately good things for his Chosen People and the world. The same was true for the evil action of Judas toward Jesus. Hundreds more could be referenced, but I believe that most readers will understand that many examples are noted all throughout the Bible. It is important to remember that God is so powerful and wise that he is able to work his will through our wills, including even mitigating the evil things that humans may do as he uses them for ultimate good. Very importantly, God does all of this without interfering with our free will.
* Human Suffering: When Jesus was asked a question about why a person was blind, he answered, *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*” (John 9:3) God sometimes uses human suffering to reveal his power and loving care for those who are suffering. He also can use it as a form of discipline… “*You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.”* (Deut 8:5) God also shows his mercy and sympathy during these times of pain… “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,* ***4****who comforts us in all our tribulation.”* (2 Cor 1:3-4) He can also use suffering to bring people to him… “*Lord, in trouble they have visited You, they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them.”* (Isaiah 26:16)

In summary, God uses his infinite power, wisdom, and knowledge to infallibly accomplish his eternal goals for the universe and everything in it. These goals include the final destiny for everything in the world, including all of mankind. All of this is done to the glory of God. We can be thankful for all of this because we have a perfect and loving God and there is no doubt that he will use his omnipotent providential care to bring about a wonderful future for all those who place their faith in him.

**Conclusion:**

I have just completed a brief review of forty important biblical doctrines. Actually, considering I combined a few doctrines every now and then as I wrote this treatise, approximately forty-five doctrines were discussed. Although this book covers virtually every known Bible doctrine in the literature, it does so in a relatively concise manner. For example, this book is approximately 10% the size of most Systematic Theology books (those books that discuss Bible doctrine). The point of writing this book was to create a book that a person could reasonably expect to start and finish and still cover every doctrinal subject in the Bible that affects the followers of Christ. Almost every point that was made was backed up by corresponding Bible verses. On the handful of topics on which fine theologians disagree, both sides of the arguments were always presented. The reader is encouraged to make up their own mind in these instances. Rest assured, none of these controversial areas have anything to do with the gospel message. I hope that by studying this concise encyclopedia of biblical doctrines, the readers will understand the Bible more completely and draw closer to Christ, our Lord and Savior.